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Charles's popularity rivals Blair's

Public swings in favour of the Prince

By PETER RIDDELL

THE Prince of Wales has become as popular as Tony Blair after a big swing of public opinion in his favour since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, according to a MORI poll for *The Times*.

The poll, undertaken earlier this month, shows that more than three-fifths of the public is satisfied with the way Prince Charles is doing his job with less than three in ten dissatisfied. This is the same balance as for Mr Blair. Despite a drop in the Prime Minister's ratings over the past month, these figures are still higher than those achieved by Margaret Thatcher at any time in her premiership.

These findings suggest that the public generally approves of the changed way that the Prince has handled his public appearances and his relations with his sons, Princes William and Harry, since their mother's death on August 31.

The precise figures are 61 per cent satisfied with the Prince, and 29 dissatisfied, compared with 61 to 27 per cent for Mr Blair. But as recently as August, just before the death of the Princess, more people (46 per cent) were dissatisfied than satisfied (42 per cent) with the Prince.

The Prince of Wales has improved his ratings most among those aged over 55, with the middle classes and with Labour voters. His appeal seems to be strongest among the same non-Tory middle classes that have swung behind Mr Blair in the past couple of years. Mr Blair has higher approval ratings



A gift for the Prince at a Bristol cancer centre

in favour of the monarchy since September.

The net balance believing that Britain would be worse off if the monarchy was abolished is now higher than over the past four years, though it is lower than during the late 1980s before all the controversy started over the break-up of the marriages of Prince Charles and Prince Andrew.

There are sharp contrasts in attitudes to the monarchy among various social groups. The largest number believing that Britain would be better off if the monarchy were abolished are in Wales (27 per cent), among the unemployed (25 per cent) and readers of *The Guardian* (32 per cent) and *The Independent* (26 per cent). Readers of tabloid papers are, in general, more supportive of the monarchy than the average.

Satisfaction with the way Prince Charles is doing his job as Prince of Wales is highest among readers of the *Daily Telegraph* (72 per cent), *The Times* and *Daily Mail* (69 per cent), *Daily Express* (68 per cent) and *Sun* (64 per cent).

Prince William and Prince Harry will travel to Sandringham today to join the rest of the Royal Family for their first Christmas without their mother. After church and lunch the family will gather round the television to watch the Queen's Christmas broadcast in which she is expected to pay a warm and generous tribute to Princess Diana.

MORI interviewed 2,122 adults on December 12 to 15 at 169 sampling points across Britain.



Girls, aged 12, from the Salisbury Cathedral School Choir yesterday singing at their last rehearsal before tonight's Christmas Eve concert

Geoffrey Boycott becomes star of the East

By TUNKU VARADARAJAN

MILLIONS of young boys in India have become devoted followers of a strange cult, speaking a language they barely understand, crying out words of devotion such as "roobish" and "Roob, you lazy booger." The subcontinent has a new icon, and his name is Geoffrey Boycott.

The flat tones of the former England opening batsman may not have won him much of a youth following in his homeland but his international cricket commentaries on the Star TV system have made him an object of wonder in India.

So great is the addiction to Boycott, 57, that one group of schoolboys were given six of

the best by their headmaster for speaking at all times in their version of the Yorkshire accent. Their favourite word was "roobish" — used by Boycott to describe a bad shot or an inept delivery.

The key to his popularity lies in his pithy approach. Indian viewers, accustomed to stilted commentators whose language veers between the ornate and the long-winded, enjoy his devil-may-care independence. He uses words such as mad, crazy, silly, stupid and pathetic. "That's daft creek-it," he says. "My moon could have hit that for six with a toothbrush."

A roar of laughter could be heard across India when he criticised an umpire's decision with the words "If that's out, then I'm a Pakistani."

Test and one-day matches are watched in every home where there is a television set, and Boycott's popularity is growing among the older generation. When it is Boycott's turn to commentate, even Indian "moons" come out of the kitchen. Not since Rex Harrison took India by storm in *My Fair Lady* has an Englishman's accent been as widely imitated.

It was not always thus, of course. There was a time when Boycott was virtually persona non grata in India. He floundered out of England's tour of 1981-2 (when the two teams played one of the dreariest Test series of the modern age) claiming that he

was ill. He was seen on the golf course days after his departure, giving rise to the reasonable conjecture that his illness had been a cover for his subsequent South African rebel excursion.

Yet Indians have now forgiven him, and the Yorkshireman has gone out of his way to learn something about Indian popular culture.

To the astonishment of millions this month, he infused his commentary during the India-Sri Lanka series with numerous references to Daler Mehndi, a Sikh singer who currently tops the charts. "I like that Dollar Mendi and his foony-cooler turbans," Boycott told an astonished audience. "Aye, and he sings soom great tunes."



Boycott: an icon for today's young Indians

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Terrorists out for Christmas

Patrick Magee, the IRA terrorist who nearly killed Margaret Thatcher and her Cabinet in the 1984 Brighton bombing, was released from the Maze prison outside Belfast to spend 10 days with the woman he married this summer. Magee was one of 86 republican and 74 loyalist prisoners let out. Page 2

The Times

The Times will not be published on Christmas Day but will appear as usual on Boxing Day. We wish readers a happy Christmas.

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The great getaway holiday

BRITONS take to the road, rail and skies in their droves today for the Christmas exodus, with a record 650,000 people choosing to spend the festive season abroad.

The scale of the getaway pales in comparison with Ireland where a third of the 3.5 million population was estimated to be on the move either yesterday or today — many to join relatives in Britain.

In Britain most holiday-makers have opted for the Canary Islands, mainland Spain and Portugal while the most popular long-haul destinations are Florida, Goa and the Caribbean.

Forecasters predict that for those who stay behind Britain will be mild with rain or showers. Boxing Day is expected to be brighter and fresher.

Forecast, page 18

Schools may experiment with a five-term year

By DAVID CHARTER, EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

SCHOOLS are being asked to run a five-term year to find out if it improves pupils' attendance and results.

The Local Government Association will write to local education authorities next week asking for volunteers to reorganise the traditional three-term pattern for the school calendar.

A five-term year would run on eight-week terms with two week holidays in between, but retain a six-week summer holiday in July and August. The plan is less ambitious than that proposed by Margaret Hodge, MP, chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, who suggested shortening the six-week summer break.

Ivor Widdison, education policy officer at the Local

Government Association, said that a consultation of schools, parents and holiday resorts six years ago on a four-term year was split 50-50.

Mr Widdison added: "Five-term years would allow a more consistent pattern for school examinations and would stop the 'end of term' ethos, which is often unproductive for children."

"We realise this is a radical proposal and that the education system has been through a lot of changes recently, but we hope that some local authorities, with the support of schools, parents and the local community, including employers, will agree to start a pilot project."

A five-term approach has been adopted at some of the 15 City Technology Colleges, the

state-funded "centres of excellence" set up to revive results in deprived areas.

Graham Lane, chairman of the Local Government Association education committee, said: "Where the five-term year has been introduced, it has been particularly popular with students and parents."

Margaret Morrissey, spokesman for the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations, said: "A significant number of parents work and they are in favour of change because they feel it would be easier to get their children looked after."

"But we do feel that it is for the parents to decide and it is a good opportunity for local government and parents and teachers to work together."



High-fat diet may cut strokes

American specialists today report that a high-fat diet reduces the risk of stroke. For each 3 per cent increase in fat as a proportion of total energy, there is a 15 per cent fall in the risk of stroke.

The report suggests that the advice which has given for decades by charities and public health experts may actually be increasing the number of stroke deaths. Page 5

Comedian's wife gives kidney to daughter

By RICHARD DUCE

THE daughter of the comedian Jasper Carrott was recovering in hospital last night after receiving a kidney from her mother.

Carrott's wife Hazel gave the kidney to their daughter Lucy, 24, who plays *The Archers* character Hayley Jordan, during an operation at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital nine days ago. They were booked into the hospital under their real family name of Davis.

Miss Davis has suffered a history of renal illness over the last three years and it is understood that because of a shortage of donors it was eventually decided that her mother should give one of her kidneys.

She followed her father, real name Bob Davis, into showbusiness and



Jasper Carrott and Lucy, who now has one of her mother's kidneys



made her television debut three years ago with a part in *Pride and Prejudice*. Jasper Carrott issued a statement last night saying: "This is a private family affair. The family is very happy and I hope that with the new code of

conduct for journalists the press will be sympathetic to our situation and allow my wife and daughter to recuperate in private."

A hospital spokeswoman said last night that the operation had been a

success and both mother and daughter "are recovering well".

The Birmingham-born comedian — voted both ITV and BBC personality of the year in 1994 — and his wife have three other children: Jenny, 20, Hannah, 18 and Jake, 15.

His agent Steve Hutt said last night: "It is a private family matter. Jasper's been under a lot of pressure recently and the family doesn't want any publicity."

Advancement in the use of anti-rejection drugs means that Miss Davis is unlikely to suffer a relapse after an operation that took several hours. Because of the shortage of "dead donors" it has become increasingly common for one family member to donate a kidney to another.

Mrs Davis is expected to be able to lead a normal life with one kidney.

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India debacle prompts Cook to seek rethink of royal trips



Cook: advice on media

By JILL SHERMAN
CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

AN OVERHAUL of royal state visits is being planned by the Government after the Queen's disastrous tour of Pakistan and India in October.

The Foreign Secretary, who accompanied the Queen, has demanded a rethink to avoid a repetition of the debacle when the Indians dismissed Britain as a "third-rate power". Robin Cook has now insisted that he be accompanied by his own senior media adviser from the Foreign Office on any future visit, so that the "heavy-lifter" can counter any damaging stories from the royal

press corps and put his own gloss on stories if necessary.

Mr Cook has also asked for the Foreign Office to be more involved in the advance planning of royal state visits and to ensure that their focus is on the future rather than the past. The Foreign Secretary is said to have felt frustrated that the Indian tour, during the 50th anniversary of India's independence, harked back to the days of the Empire, rather than looking to build trade relations. Mr Cook had many meetings with business leaders to try to bang the drum for British exports but none was reported by the British media. He hopes in future to promote a more "modern"

approach to state visits with less emphasis on imperial heritage.

Foreign Office officials are already meticulously preparing for the Queen's state visit to Malaysia next September to attend the Commonwealth Games, when she will be again accompanied by Mr Cook.

The Foreign Secretary is anxious that the new arrangements should be introduced by then. He will seek to avoid any obvious pitfalls such as mention of the Pergau Dam affair, which damaged relations between the two countries for several months in 1994.

Although relations have improved between the two countries since then they are still not good.

Robin Cook is said to have annoyed Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysian Prime Minister, with remarks about human rights during a recent tour of southeast Asia.

On this year's trip to the subcontinent, Mr Cook was unprepared when the Pakistani press published reports about a private meeting between himself and Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistani Foreign Minister. Reports suggesting that Mr Cook had suggested Britain could intervene to help find a "just solution" to the dispute over Kashmir infuriated the Indians and overshadowed the rest of the Queen's tour. Although Mr Cook denied that he had made any public comments about the

meeting, he had no "spin doctor" to brief British journalists.

Matters worsened after a speech by the Queen in Islamabad when she called on Pakistan and India to settle their "historical" differences over Kashmir. Officials travelling with the Queen said she had acted on her Government's advice.

When the Queen reached India, a row broke out about whether she would be allowed to make a second big speech after the one in Delhi. In the end she made a few comments at the second event in Madras.

There was also concern from some Palace officials that the Queen had not received the admiration accorded to her in the past. Foreign

Office officials were annoyed, however, that a trip to Amritsar, which was expected to be one of the diplomatic troublespots, proved to be a great success but was not reported.

Mr Cook had apparently queried the decision to visit Pakistan first, where sensitive issues were bound to be raised, and then India, but was told this was the way it had been done during the last royal visit. At the end of the tour he also questioned the wisdom of arranging a visit to India during the year it was celebrating its independence; he blamed the Conservatives for having set the date.

Leading article, page 15

Bomber Magee heads terrorists on 10-day leave

PATRICK MAGEE, the IRA terrorist who nearly killed Margaret Thatcher and her Cabinet in the 1984 Brighton bombing, was released from the Maze prison outside Belfast yesterday to spend 10 days with the woman he quietly married this summer.

Magee, who was sentenced to 35 years for bombing the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference, married 31-year-old American novelist Barbara Byer in August.

Magee, branded "a man of exceptional cruelty and inhumanity" by the judge who handed him eight life sentences, walked out of the Maze just after noon.

A stocky, bearded figure, he kept his head down and said nothing as television crews pursued him to a red Peugeot where a tall, slim, red-haired woman dressed in a black leather coat was waiting for him. She also remained silent.

They drove away at speed from the prison car park towards the republican stronghold of West Belfast.

Those who know Magee say his militant republicanism has not mellowed during his 11 years behind bars. He is studying novels about the "Troubles" for a PhD, and is said to have developed a relationship with Ms Byer, who comes from Connecticut, through correspondence. They married in a ceremony at the Maze in August, attended by about 25 relatives and fellow inmates. It was Magee's second marriage and his new wife has now moved to Belfast to be near him. Magee, aged 46, was one of 86 republican

Martin Fletcher reports as 160 inmates are let out for Christmas family holidays

and 74 loyalist prisoners let out for Christmas leave yesterday, but not the only one for whom the next 10 days will be a de facto honeymoon.

Paul Kavanagh, one of the 1987 Chelsea Barracks bombers, was freed from the Maze, and his wife, Martina Anderson, jailed for her part in the IRA's 1985 bombing campaign against English seaside resorts, was released from the Maghaberry prison in County Antrim. They exchanged vows in May 1989, at a ceremony in Full Sutton prison, near York, but have had little or no chance before now to consummate their marriage.

The releases began shortly before 9.00 am. Prisoners from republican H-blocks and loyalist H-blocks were let out alternately, and with long gaps in between so they did not meet outside. It was early afternoon before the process was completed.

Beyond the high wire fence, topped with coiled razor wire, wives and children waited patiently in the car park beneath a leaden sky. Some cheered as their men were let out, others made do with a quick kiss, and then they were off — the released inmates clutching brown paper bags

containing a few possessions. Sinead Walsh's husband was jailed nine years ago for possessing explosives, and this was his first Christmas leave. It was also the first time her nine-year-old daughter, Mairead, has seen her father outside a visiting room and her excitement was obvious.

Separately, the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party, the political wings of the main loyalist paramilitary organisations, have met Mo Mowlam, the Northern Ireland Secretary, over the past two days to warn of their members' collapsing confidence in a peace process they consider one-sided.

The release of terrorists like Magee, Kavanagh and his accomplice, Thomas Quigley, have enraged their victims' families, and Tory and Unionist politicians.

But Northern Ireland's prison service argues that its unique, long-running home leave schemes help inmates maintain family links and reduce the chances of them re-offending when eventually released.

Adam Ingram, Northern Ireland's security minister, sympathised with the distress of terrorist victims, but said the schemes were "probably the most valued and respected privileges available to prisoners here and contribute in no small measure to their eventual resettlement."

□ The Irish government yesterday gave 10 IRA convicts 10 days Christmas leave. They included Thomas McMahon, who assassinated Earl Mountbatten of Burma in 1979 but has since left the IRA.



Patrick Magee, the Brighton Bomber, leaving the Maze Prison yesterday

Welfare row eats into Blair holiday

By ANDREW PIERCE, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

TONY BLAIR interrupted his Christmas break at Chequers yesterday to defend his plans to reform the welfare state, as protests continued from Labour MPs and disabled campaigners. The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr George Carey also entered the controversy with a warning to the Government not to target the vulnerable and the poor.

The Prime Minister chose to lead the fightback with a series of television and radio interviews at the Bernard Arms, the public house closest to his country residence. But the offensive was overshadowed when Malcolm Chisholm, who resigned as a Scottish Office Minister in protest at the cut in benefit to lone parents, said the Government had lost public trust.

"The problem has arisen because of the catastrophic

error we made in cutting lone parents' benefits," he said on Radio 4's PM programme. "We have betrayed our principles. That is why we have lost the trust of the British people on welfare reform."

Mr Blair repeatedly declined to say whether the shake-up would produce losers, but added that disabled people with genuine needs had nothing to fear. "My idea of benefit reform and welfare reform is not to take away help from those who genuinely need it."

Dr Carey said that he understood the logic behind the review, but said that the Government had to strike a delicate balance between modernising the system and protecting the most vulnerable.

Family holiday, page 6

Family despairs of finding bodies

By PAUL WILKINSON AND STEPHEN FARRELL

MEMBERS of the British family who lost three generations in the Luxor massacre have given up hope of finding the body of Karina Turner before the new year.

It has been more than five weeks since Miss Turner, 24, her five-year-old daughter Shaunnah, and her mother Joan Turner, 53, were killed in the terrorist attack. No date has been fixed for their funeral.

The service at their local church in Ripponden, West Yorkshire, was cancelled at short notice a month ago when it was discovered that the body in Joan's coffin was not hers. Days later it was revealed that her daughter's body was also missing.

Joan Turner's body has since been returned from Switzerland and the body of a Swiss woman sent to Zurich.

But police and Foreign Office officials are still trying to trace Karina Turner's body, amid fears that it may already have been buried or cremated abroad. They are also trying to establish the identity of the body wrongly named as hers, which is still in Halifax.

Ken Robertshaw, Joan Turner's nephew, an inspector with West Yorkshire Police, said: "We are just sitting and waiting, there is nothing more we can do. We are totally in the hands of the various government agencies."

□ The son of two other Luxor victims has called on the Foreign Office to overhaul its procedures after being charged £180 for his parents' death certificates. Officials backed down after Paul Wigham complained. His parents, George and Ivy, of Swanley, Kent, were killed.

Peers face quick reform of Lords

By ANDREW PIERCE, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

HEREDITARY peers could be stripped of their voting rights as early as 1999, the Lord Chancellor predicted yesterday, with legislation in the next Queen's Speech.

Lord Irvine of Lairg, who in the new year will chair the Cabinet committee that will pave the way for the changes, held out the prospect of direct elections to a reformed second chamber to avoid the creation of "the biggest quango in the nation's history".

The Tories have claimed that Mr Blair plans to replace the hereditary peers with hundreds of Labour life peers in a huge extension of prime ministerial patronage.

But Lord Irvine said his committee would look at all options — a fully nominated, fully elected chamber, or a mix. Of a nominated chamber he said: "I think that it would

be important to avoid the perception of the biggest quango in our nation's history."

Viscount Cranborne, the Tory Leader of the Lords, challenged Lord Irvine to replace simultaneously the hereditary peers with an elected or independent element.

But Lord Irvine said: "It would be very important to ensure, if the nominated option prevailed, it was perceived not as a big quango but as a house of all the talents of the nation and fairly appointed."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Dome spectacular is abandoned

The spectacular show being devised by Sir Cameron Mackintosh for the Millennium Dome has been scrapped along with plans to build a 12,000-seat auditorium in the centre of the dome. Sir Cameron's show would have involved 2,000 children on stage for two performances a day, but he will now be the creative adviser for a scaled-down show. A piazza visible from all corners of the dome will replace the theatre.

The New Millennium Experience said last night that the cost of the theatre, and the possibility of using the money instead for developing other exhibits, had been minor considerations. The main reasons for abandoning the auditorium had been logistical: moving people in and out between shows would have been very slow, involving long queues.

Sir Cameron said that he was disappointed, but also felt a tinge of relief. "I am delightfully free of an extraordinary responsibility which was giving me sleepless nights. Now I can retire to my croft in Scotland for Hogmanay in 1999."

Cheer for homeless

The country's largest Christmas centre for the homeless opened its doors yesterday afternoon. Over the coming week an estimated 2,000 people will be provided with a bed, food, clothes and warmth, as well as a full Christmas meal and health checks, inside the warehouse in Bermondsey, south London. The building, owned by the BBC, normally stores millions of copies of *Radio Times*. It is the biggest of 35 centres being run throughout the country by Crisis, the charity for the homeless.

Illegal migrants held

After a two-hour chase police detained two dozen illegal immigrants from five countries who jumped out of the back of a lorry near Maidstone, Kent, yesterday. Roadblocks were set up and a light aircraft used to track the suspects as they ran off across fields. It is thought the 22 men and two women broke into the lorry when it was parked in Belgium. Stuart Dietrich watched the immigrants jump out. "It was just like a scene from *The Great Escape*," he said. "They just came pouring out, one after another, and sprinted off."

Lies and statistics

Even before Jack the Ripper stalked the streets of London in 1888 police forces were massaging crime rates to protect their budgets and increase manpower, according to a new study. Dr Howard Taylor, of the University of Nottingham, says that Victorian police statistics tend to be constant because the number of prosecutions was budgeted for and rationed in advance. Crimes were kept to an average of 90,000 a year with many more conveniently "lost" and for 86 years bureaucrats "rationed" murders to 150 a year.

Briton allowed home

A woman facing up to 25 years in jail for alleged multimillion-pound fraud in Kenya has been allowed home to Britain for Christmas. Kerry Page, 28, of Cleckheaton, west Yorkshire, was allowed to leave Kenya on compassionate grounds, but has been told she must return for her trial in the new year. She has been on bail following her arrest on charges of handling stolen goods and theft arising from the refugee crisis in Somalia three years ago. She said: "I am innocent."

NFU chief quits over beef

The chief executive of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland has resigned after criticism of the union's actions over the beef crisis. In a personal statement Tom Brady said he could not bring himself to change the advice given to his former president Sandy Mole. "It had become clear that the advice I was giving to the president was out of line with the mood of the majority of the members of the Scottish NFU," Mr Brady said. Mr Brady insisted there was "no acrimony" at his departure.

Young Turk weds again

A Turkish waiter who married a 13-year-old British girl after meeting her while she was on holiday has married again, this time to a Muslim woman in a traditional Islamic ceremony. Musa Komeagac, 21, was fined the equivalent of £5 earlier this year for his unlawful wedding in January 1996 to Sarah Cook. She subsequently gave birth to a baby boy after meeting the waiter on a family holiday in Turkey. She was made a ward of court in Britain and returned home in February last year.



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We're off to work for too long, says 'Doc'

By MARK HENDERSON

SIX junior doctors were introduced yesterday as Dopey, Sleepy, Sneezy, Grumpy, Bashful, and Happy to illustrate the dangers of working too many hours in spite of an agreement to limit their shifts.

One junior doctor in five is still forced to work excessive hours, the British Medical Association said. Patients continued to be at risk.

Among the junior doctor "dwarves" only Happy, Jonathan Fielden, an anaesthetist at Southampton University NHS Trust, felt conditions were improving for them.

"The NHS is beginning to realise that tired doctors are not good for patients," he said. "The other 'dwarves' emphasised the dangers of overwork, such as exhaustion, a short temper, lapses of concentration and working while sick."

The association's junior doctors' committee said that more than 5,000 were working excessive hours. Under the agreement that came into full effect a year ago, junior doctors should not be on duty for more than 72 hours a week or work with patients for more than 56 hours, except in exceptional circumstances.

Mark Porter, chairman of the committee, said a failure to enforce the new regulations was putting lives at risk.

"There is the potential for compromise on patient safety," he said. "A New England Journal of Medicine study showed long periods without sleep could impair motor func-



Mark Porter, chairman of the BMA junior doctors' committee, unveils his six junior doctor "dwarves" yesterday to demonstrate the dangers of excessive working hours

tions to the same extent as 70 mg of alcohol, just less than the drink-drive limit. A tired junior doctor is similar to someone who might have been driving down the road after a Christmas party."

Dr Porter wrote yesterday to Alan Milburn, the health min-

ister with responsibility for junior doctors, to ask that the new deal be enforced through regional task forces with the power to order NHS trusts to cut excessive hours.

Dr Porter, an anaesthetist at Birmingham Heartlands Hos-

pital, billed himself as Doc and unveiled the other doctor "dwarves".

Sleepy — Huw Jones, also an anaesthetist at Birmingham Heartlands — said he would frequently work after three to four hours of sleep, which was "reasonably good as far as hours are concerned".

He would often be woken to perform routine tasks such as taking blood that could properly be done by nursing and auxiliary staff.

Judith Kerr, or Sneezy, a psychiatrist at St Christopher's Hospital, Fareham, Hampshire, said junior doc-

tors were often forced to work when sick. "When I was a house officer on a geriatric ward, I once had acute food poisoning," she said. "There was no one else to take over. I just had to carry on."

Grumpy, surgical house officer Liz Soilleux of Milton

Keynes General Hospital, complained that junior doctors were paid at half rates for overtime instead of the double pay given to other NHS staff.

"Most people are reticent about claiming for the hours they actually work or trying to change things because they are worried it will have an adverse effect on their career prospects," she said.

Dr Soilleux's view was echoed by Bashful, a senior house officer in an accident and emergency department who did not want to be identified because he felt he had been held back by consultants after complaining to the press about hours in the past.

Dopey, or Paul Flynn, an obstetrician at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne, said his thought processes "slowed down enormously" when he was on a long night shift after little sleep.

Dr Porter said he hoped Mr Milburn would play Snow White rather than be a Wicked Witch and enforce the new hours. Barbara Connah, of the NHS Confederation, which represents all NHS trusts and health authorities, said that most had implemented the new deal. "Trusts have had to take on more junior doctors to cut their working hours."

Scottish parliament building to cost more

By SIBIRLES ENGLISH

THE estimated cost of building a Scottish parliament has risen from £40 million to between £50 and £65 million, the Government confirmed yesterday.

The price tag will depend on which of four shortlisted sites is chosen and on undisclosed additional costs, including architects' fees, VAT and the acquisition of land. Cost is likely to play an important part in the deliberations of Donald Dewar, the Scottish Secretary, who is expected to decide on the winning location during the Christmas break. His decision will be announced before the second reading of the Scotland Bill on January 12. An

international architectural competition will then be opened for the building's design: the parliament building will not be completed until 2001, one year after the Members meet for the first time.

Yesterday the Scottish Office released feasibility studies on all four sites, three of which are in the centre of Edinburgh and one at Leith docklands. As expected, St Andrew's House at Carlton Hill, Scotland's traditional seat of power, emerged as the most expensive option at £65 million because of its status as a Grade A listed building. The three new-build sites, at Leith, a car park at Haymarket, and opposite the Palace of Holyroodhouse on the Royal Mile, were all estimated as

costing £50 million. Apparently, visits to modern parliaments abroad had suggested that the building would have to be larger than had been envisaged.

Yesterday it appeared that Haymarket was trailing in the race to house the parliament. The site opposite Holyroodhouse was a late entry, but is now considered a frontrunner. Mr Dewar would not be drawn on which site he favoured, although he neglected to mention Haymarket as he talked about the pros and cons of each.

The feasibility studies will now form part of a two-week exhibition in Edinburgh and Glasgow of photographs, models and drawings.



Dewar: to decide on site

Final can of Spam leaves a bitter taste

By RUSSELL JENKINS

THE last blue and yellow can of Spam rolled off a British conveyor belt yesterday after 40 years and innumerable jokes. The Newforge factory in Liverpool is closing down with the loss of 140 jobs after losing the licence to produce Spam for the Hormel Food Corporation of Minnesota, which is switching European production to Denmark.

Malcolm Johnson, managing director of Newforge, is bitter that the American company decided to withdraw the licence after Newforge achieved profits of £500,000 last year on sales of about £5 million. He said that £15 million had been invested in the company over the past 18 months. He said last night: "I will not eat another can of Spam for as long as I live."

"We are closing after a generation of producing Spam. It was done without any discussion whatsoever. We have increased market share significantly, increased profits and increased investment in the plant."

"We are a dedicated Spam factory, so there is little else we can do," he said. "I will be working throughout Christmas to see if we have any other options."

Spam, a contraction of shoulder pork and ham, was

first produced in America in 1937. Since then billions of cans of it have been sliced, diced, fried, casserolled and grilled. It was the first luncheon meat that survived moderately fresh without being kept in a refrigerator and has been marketed ever since on its versatility as a food suitable for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Cans of Spam were dished out to American soldiers in the war as part of their basic rations. Now distinctly middle-aged, it has not only retained its market share but is popular with a new generation of young Americans.

In Britain the combination of shoulder ham, salt, water and sugar has thrived as the butt of jokes. It was immortalised by the Monty Python team in a sketch about the café that sells little else. Customers sing: "Wonderful Spam, lovely Spam."

Spam mania is a recognised phenomenon in America, where lovers of the convenience food flock to its home town of Austin, Minnesota, for regular Spam fests.

Spam became popular in austerity Britain because it was not subject to rationing. It was imported into this country until 1957, when it was first manufactured on Merseyside.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Clue points to murder of mother

Detectives searching for a missing mother-of-two believe she was murdered by her boyfriend, who then committed suicide. A new witness has told police he saw 29-year-old Helen Profit's boyfriend, Mark Coldrick, dragging an object in a rolled-up rug into the back seat of his car shortly after her disappearance a week ago.

The next day Mr Coldrick, 30, blew himself up with a petrol bomb at a disused quarry near their home in Newport, Gwent. Police have upgraded the investigation to a murder inquiry.

Maiden cruise

The 63,000 tonne superliner *Aradisa*, which replaces the *Canberra*, set sail from Southampton on her maiden voyage yesterday for a 12-night Christmas cruise which will be followed by a three-month world cruise in January.

Rural ride alert

Police in Northumberland have clamped down on off-road motorcyclists illegally churning up the countryside and disturbing quiet villages. In Operation Mud Plug, bikers have been stopped and warned not to continue into rural areas.

Presenter banned

The presenter of the Channel 4 programme *People's Parliament*, Lesley Riddoch, was banned for a year after admitting drink-driving. Riddoch, 37, of Fowles Wester by Crief, Tayside, who drove into a tree, was also fined £400 at Perth Sheriff Court.

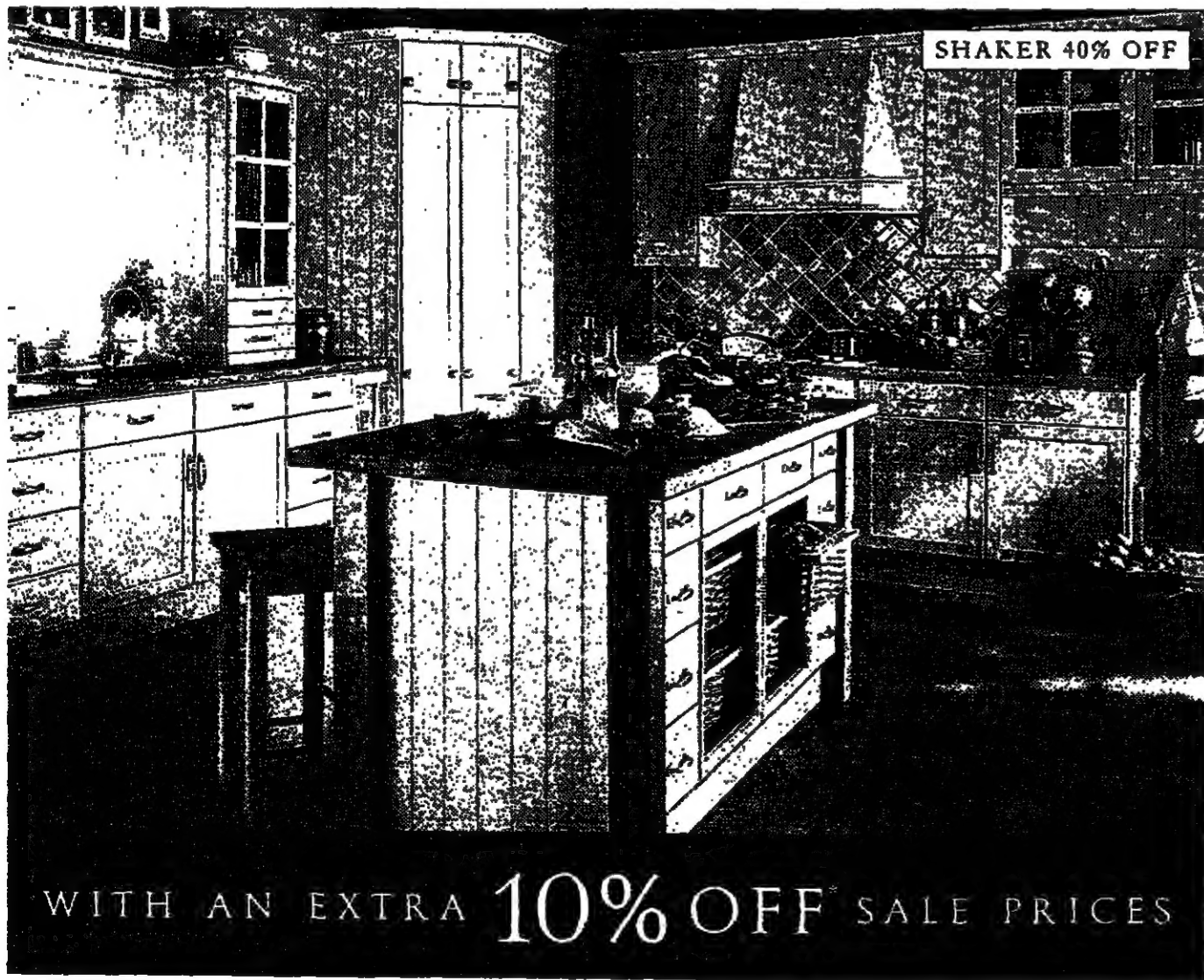
Rescuer's award



A clergyman who rescued a drowning boy was awarded the Royal Humane Society's certificate of vellum. Canon Bob Fyffe, 41, minister of St John's Episcopal Church, Perth, dived into the River Tay in June and dragged Robert Martin, 11, to safety.

Better late

The bookmakers Coral is trying to trace a man who has won £40,000 after placing a £1 accumulator bet on Saturday's football results at a branch in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. He is probably unaware that one of the losing results was declared void.

HALF PRICE SALE STARTS BOXING DAY



When you buy from Magnet, you can be sure that you get a beautiful kitchen designed to meet your every need. You can also be sure that it's built to make everything life can throw at it. Right now in the Magnet January Sale, all cabinets in over 50 kitchen and bedroom ranges have been reduced, most by 50%, and there are some great offers on  and  Whirlpool appliances too.

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*opening hours: Wednesday 10am-6pm, Thursday 10am-6pm, Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 10am-6pm, Sunday 10am-4pm. Discounts are off prices charged between 24th November and 24th December. *Magnet is a registered trademark of Magnet Ltd.

Slice of life as Gorbachev overcomes the red squares

By CAROL MIDDLEY
MEDIA CORRESPONDENT

EVERY great world leader likes to leave a monument to his achievements. On New Year's Day, British television viewers will see Mikhail Gorbachev hailed for turning Russia into a land fit for Pizza Hut.

It is the first showing of the result of a much-hyped advertising deal. The father of glasnost and perestroika will be seen sitting at a table in the Pizza Hut restaurant in Red Square, Moscow, slicing up a pepperoni pan pizza with his granddaughter Anastasia, 10,

At another table, an old man says: "It is because of him we have economic confusion." A younger companion replies: "It is because of him we have opportunity." The old man contests that Gorbachev created political instability, the younger companion insists he brought freedom.

As the argument heats up, an old woman says: "It is because of him we have Pizza Hut." All the customers rise to their feet, wave slices of pizza in the air and shout: "Hail to Gorbachev."

Gorbachev, 66, does not speak during the commercial, which has English subtitles,

but merely smiles wryly to the camera. He was paid an estimated £100,000 to appear in it and the fee will go towards a real monument, establishing a permanent home for his Perestroika library and museum in central Moscow.

Gary Haigh, marketing director for Pizza Hut UK, said: "We have a strong heritage of using world-famous personalities in a humorous and light-hearted manner for our commercials. We are confident that our latest campaign will bring a smile to people's faces. It should prove one of our best yet."

Fatty diet cuts stroke risk, say US doctors

By Nigel Hawkes, Science Editor

FATTY foods may not be quite as deadly as doctors have claimed. In a timely study, American specialists today report that a high-fat diet reduces the risk of stroke.

For each 3 per cent increase in fat as a proportion of total energy, there is a 15 per cent fall in the risk of stroke, they say. So while a high-fat diet appears to increase the risk of heart disease, it cuts the risk of stroke—a finding that left British stroke experts confused.

The new figures come from the Framingham Heart Study, of residents of Framingham, Massachusetts, aimed at establishing the links between diet and heart disease. They are published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by a team from Har-

vard Medical School and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, led by Matthew Gillman.

They suggest that the advice which has been drummed home for decades by heart charities and public health specialists may actually be increasing the number of stroke deaths.

The results require confirmation, they say. "Nonetheless, the results of this study raise the possibility that restriction of fat intake among residents of Western societies, as recommended by the US National Cholesterol Education Program and others, does not decrease and could increase overall risk of ischaemic stroke."

Ischaemic stroke is caused by a blockage in a blood vessel of the head or neck, and accounts for about 80 per cent of all strokes. Deprived of blood, the brain is damaged, often leaving permanent impairment. In Britain more than 110,000 people a year suffer strokes: a third of all major strokes are fatal and another third result in disability such as paralysis.

Since the same kind of blockage is responsible for heart attacks, it has always been assumed that anything which cut heart risks would also do the same for strokes. The new study, which looked at stroke incidence and fat consumption in 832 men aged 45 to 65, over 20 years, suggests that that assumption is not justified.

The reduction in stroke risk was linked both to total fat intake and to the intake of saturated fat—the very sort that is supposed to be worst for heart disease risk. Increased consumption of mono-unsaturated fats, such as those found in olive oil, also reduced stroke risk. But polyunsaturated fat from fish and vegetable oils, often viewed as the healthiest type of fat, did not appear to reduce stroke risk.

The authors conclude: "Our data suggest that fat intake does not increase risk of stroke, even among subjects who developed coronary heart disease during the follow-up period. Moreover, fat intake was strongly inversely associated with ischaemic stroke incidence among those who did not develop coronary heart disease in the follow-up period."

The British Heart Foundation said it was surprised by the findings and needed to see full details before making a proper comment. A Stroke Association spokesman said: "There are a number of on-going studies that may give clarification on this. In the meantime, there is no reason to change the general dietary advice that is part of many health education programmes."

Scientists discover a chip for slimmers

By Nick Nuttall

PEOPLE will soon be able to make virtually fat-free chips and roast potatoes in their own kitchens following a genetic engineering breakthrough by British scientists.

The team, based at Oxford University, have devised a way of boosting the starch content of potatoes, which in turn reduces their water content and so their absorption of fat during cooking.

A spokesman for the government's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, which has helped fund the research, said yesterday: "The fat or oil content of french fries depends largely on the water content of the potato, fat replacing water during the frying process. Potatoes with a higher starch content have less water and so will take up less fat during frying."

The breakthrough also has important implications in the developing world, where potatoes are a crucial source of energy in the diet. The scientists hope to apply the same genetic engineering process to other key crops.

The discovery was made by chance by a team led by Oxford's Professor Chris Leaver and Dr Steve Hill, who were researching the way plants breathe.

Dr Hill said they had not, as yet, eaten the gene-altered potatoes. "I think it would be against the law. But one is obviously tempted to pop one into the pot."

Aspirin on trial as new weapon against cancer

By Russell Jenkins

RESEARCHERS have launched a five-year trial to investigate whether regular doses of aspirin can prevent bowel cancer, following evidence that the simple painkiller could halve the number of cases.

The disease causes more than 31,000 deaths in Britain each year, a higher toll than any other form of cancer except lung cancer. Scientists based at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham developed the initial research suggesting that using aspirin in a modified form could reduce the number of polyps or small growths that lead to the disease.

Over the next five years, the £500,000 trial will target more than 1,000 volunteers believed to be particularly susceptible to bowel cancer. Hospitals in Derby, Leicester, Salford, Bristol, Cardiff, Newport, Birmingham and Sheffield are taking part.

Many of the patients will have been treated for polyps. Some will be given a form of the drug that has been modified to reduce side-effects such as stomach upsets. Others will be given a placebo, or folic acid, a

naturally occurring substance found in some foods.

In recent years, aspirin has been shown to be important in preventing heart disease. Recent trials conducted in Bristol by Professor Chris Parakeva for the Cancer Research Campaign suggest that aspirin can influence the set of instructions which regulate cell growth and, ultimately, cell death. In the bowel, cells grow, die and are replaced more quickly than in other parts of the body.

Folic acid is also thought to be important because it helps in the production of DNA, the molecule controlling aspects of cell growth and division.

The project is the focus of seasonal fund-raising for the Cancer Research Campaign. The researchers emphasise that the aspirin is specially modified, and members of the public should not attempt self-medication.

Bowel cancer is particularly common among older men and women and is associated with poor, low-fibre diets and alcohol. Doctors advise eating a balanced diet, high in fibre, fruit and vegetables.



Trevor Breslin, reunited with his wife Catherine, 44, and their children Jack, 10, Holly, 12, and Rosie, 14

Briton back with family after kidnap ordeal

A BRITON held hostage by Nigerian oil workers in a dispute about pay and working conditions arrived home yesterday, almost a week after his escape.

Trevor Breslin, 44, who works for Western Geophysical, said he was "elated" to be back with his family in time for Christmas, after being held captive for two weeks in the country's Ondo Province.

Other captives had been released by the gang over several days in return for money. Last Wednesday more cash arrived and while it was being counted, Mr Breslin and the four others escaped on the boat that had delivered the money.

Speaking from his home in Warrington, Cheshire, Mr Breslin, a father of three, said that the pay dispute "got completely out of hand" when he and his colleagues were taken prisoner. "It was made worse by the fact that there is a tribal war going on in that area and there are a lot of armed people about. The dispute was taken over by mercenaries." (PA NEWS)

SATURDAY in THE TIMES



LINUS ROACHE
Hollywood's favourite Brit



The great new comic

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"There's someone in my house, he's got a knife..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

"Hello, my cat's stuck up a tree..."

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'If ever you wanted to have a traditional English hassle-free Christmas, then Chequers is for you'

Blairs opt for family holiday in Elizabethan splendour

By JAMES LANDALE, POLITICAL REPORTER

TONY BLAIR will this week become the first Prime Minister for eight years to spend Christmas at Chequers when he takes his family to his official country residence in Buckinghamshire for the festive break. Mr Blair, his wife, Cherie, and three children, will be joined by family and friends, including Mrs Blair's mother, Gale, and Mr Blair's father, Len.

In recent times Chequers has remained empty over Christmas while John Major celebrated the holiday quietly with his family at their home in Huntingdon. But the Blairs have chosen to enjoy a traditional English Christmas amid the 10th-century splendour of the 10-bedroomed mansion in the heart of the Chilterns. The Tudor-Elizabethan mansion, 41 miles from Downing Street, was given to the nation by Lord Lee of Fareham in 1917 and first used by Lloyd George in 1921.

Since selling their home in Islington, the Blairs have seen Chequers as a place where they can relax and escape the claustrophobia of their Downing Street flat.

They will be able to enjoy carol-singing round the 17th Christmas tree in the Great Hall, long strolls through the 1,000-acre estate, and the chance to warm their toes in front of the many log fires. Those among their guests

desiring a different sort of refreshment can wander off to the nearest hostelry, the Bernard Arms, where Boris Yeltsin once bought a round of drinks. Any subsequently unruly guests could be locked up in the Prison Room, where Elizabeth I kept Lady Jane Grey secured for two years.

On Christmas morning, the family are expected to attend the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a Roman Catholic church four miles away in the village of Great Missenden. After a large Christmas lunch in the oak-panelled Dining Room, Mr Blair is likely to join Euan, 13, Nicky, 11, and Kathryn, 9, for a kickabout game of football on the front lawn.

'We all enjoy it there. The children can be safe and really carefree'

Although the Annenberg swimming pool, where Norma Major learned to swim, will be shut, the children will be able to cycle along the long drives.

In an interview last week, Mr Blair said: "We all enjoy it there. That's where the children can be safe and really carefree. I hope to have a quiet family Christmas and a good game of football."

But with the Blairs in residence, the ten staff made up of chefs, stewards, and housekeepers — some of whom are civilians, others of whom are from the RAF and Royal Navy — will remain at work to clean, cook and serve.

Carol Thatcher, daughter of

the former Prime Minister Lady Thatcher, said the Blairs would not have to worry about housework. "There is a huge staff for them," she said. "They are not exactly going to have to worry about the turkey. If ever you wanted to have a traditional English hassle-free Christmas when you don't have to lift a finger, then Chequers is for you."

The Majors, who will be at Huntingdon this week, always preferred to be at their own home. "They thought it was a bit hard on the staff, being away from their families," a close friend said.

But when Lady Thatcher was in power, Chequers was a hubbub of festive activity. Carol Thatcher said Chequers lent itself to Christmas. "It has the atmosphere of a small Cotswold hotel," she said. "Lots of panelling, open fires, a large Christmas tree in the Great Hall. It is a lovely house in winter, both grand and

cosy." She said her mother used to have an evening drinks party on Christmas Eve, a formal family lunch with close friends after church on Christmas Day, and a buffet lunch on Boxing Day. "She always used to have the VIP Christmas cards, from royalty and film stars, prominently on the piano so everybody could read them."

Although Mrs Thatcher saw the house as a place of work, she also believed in its motto — "All care abandon ye who enter here".

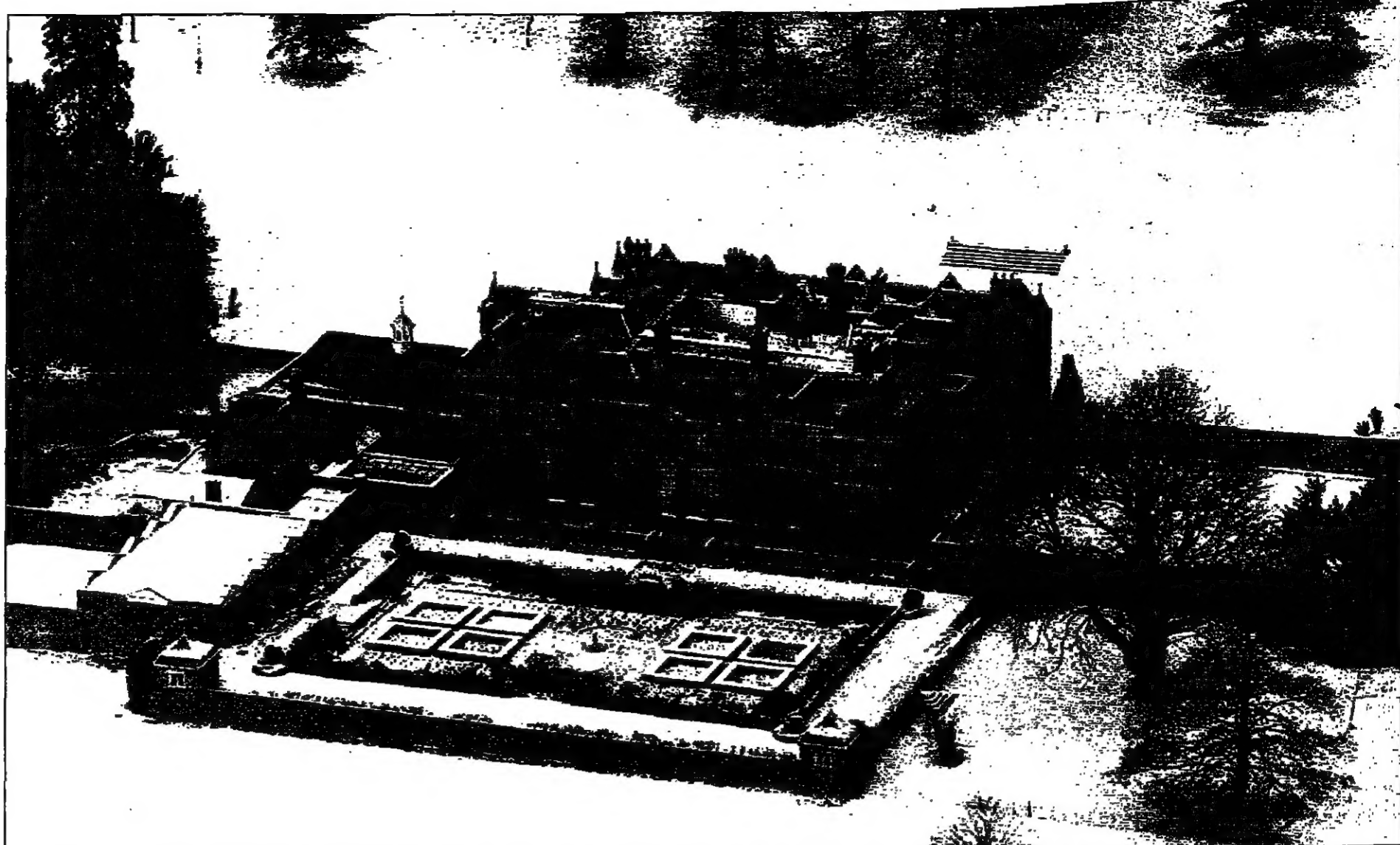
Parties would be held for the children of her closest officials and staff. Friends, both political and social, would be invited down.

Mrs Major described a Christmas with the Thatchers in her book about the house, *Chequers: The Prime Minister's Country House and Its History*. She wrote: "At Christmas there was usually a tour of the house and grounds,

followed by a film show. But while her guests were watching *Around the World in Eighty Days* or *Ring of Bright Water*, the Prime Minister was likely to slip quietly away to immerse herself in a hefty report, in much the same way as the rest of us might curl up with the latest thriller."

Mrs Major added that the former Prime Minister James (now Lord) Callaghan and his family were equally keen on Christmas at Chequers. "The Callaghans were regarded with great affection by the staff and the family deeply appreciated the cheerfulness with which the staff gave up their Christmas to look after them," she wrote.

"They went to great pains with the small touches that mean so much; the children were delighted by the life-sized 'snow-covered' reindeer and sleigh, made by the staff, which greeted them on Christmas morning."



Chequers, the Prime Minister's retreat in the heart of the Chilterns, was given to the nation by Lord Lee of Fareham in 1917 and first used by Lloyd George in 1921



Mark, Margaret, Denis and Carol Thatcher at Chequers for Christmas 1981

Irvine seeks southern sun as colleagues stay at home

By JAMES LANDALE

ALMOST the entire Cabinet will spend the Christmas holiday quietly at home with their families in Britain — except for Lord Irvine of Lairg.

While his ministerial colleagues have eschewed the holiday hideaways in Tuscany and Provence, the wealthy Lord Chancellor has headed off for a spot of southern hemisphere sun.

Even Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General, is staying away from his San Gimignano villa and Cannes apartment to be with his family in his £1 million country home near Godalming in Surrey. Apart from carving the turkey, Mr Robinson will follow his own longstanding tradition of reading a Shakespeare play over the break.

Within hours of the House of Lords rising last Friday, Lord Irvine packed his bags and flew off with his wife to South Africa's summer sun.

"It is nothing so exciting as a safari," his officials said, pointedly refusing to say exactly where he was staying. "It is just an ordinary holiday. Although he might fit in the odd meeting with the Justice Minister out there." After ten days by the pool, Lord Irvine will return to spend a few days in Britain. But in the first week of January the peer will then head for the Caribbean, where he will join Betty Boothroyd for the six-day Commonwealth Speakers' Conference in Trinidad and Tobago.

Among his many roles, the Lord Chancellor is also the Speaker of the House of Lords. His officials denied the trip was "a junker" and insisted that serious work would take place among the palm trees and rum punches.

Despite the exotic destinations, Lord Irvine's Christmas will pale beside those enjoyed by his predecessor, Cardinal Wolsey, to whom he recently compared himself.

Christmas for Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor would have involved a gargantuan meal at Hampton Court, where he lived in the 1520s until his fall from grace.

According to Peter Brears, a food historian who re-enacts similar feasts at Hampton Court, the Christmas lunch would have been dominated by all sorts of meat and game.

This would have included swan, quail, mallard, pigeon, rabbit, woodcock, curlew, crane, goose, heron, various

deer as well as chicken and pork. One expensive delicacy popular at the time was porpoise and seal meat.

The centrepiece of the meal would have been a wild boar's head, stuffed with its brains mixed with diced tongue, spices and herb. The whole thing would have been wrapped in cloth and boiled for ten hours.

Absent from the table, of course, were turkey and potatoes which had yet to be introduced from the Americas. Drink would have been English red and white wine. After a pudding of sweetmeats and sugared wafers, the cardinal could have settled back to enjoy the jesters, jugglers and story tellers.

Back in the closing years of the 20th century, Gordon Brown will spend a quiet Christmas in Fife with his family and his girlfriend Sarah MacCaulay. The Chancellor could, of course, use his official country residence at Dorneywood for a festive blow-out, but he has not stayed at the 45-room mansion in Buckinghamshire since taking office.

John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, will be in Hull with his family. Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, and Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, will remain in London, and David Blunkett, the Education Secretary, in Sheffield.



Cardinal Wolsey: home for a huge Christmas meal

Students score over masterminds

By JOHN O'LEARY, EDUCATION EDITOR

STUDENTS salvaged their reputation as the brains of Britain last night when the reigning champions of *University Challenge* beat a team of finalists from the rival television quiz show, *Mastermind*.

A record low score last month by an all-woman team from Cambridge University brought claims of "dumbing down" in the country's most prestigious seats of learning. But a mixed foursome from Magdalen College, Oxford, redressed the balance in style.

Magdalen overcame the 1997, last-ever *Mastermind* champion and three runners-up in a Christmas special. The 20-205 victory on BBC 2 will help to erase the

memory of New Hall's highly-publicised humiliation. The Oxford team triumphed even though the *Mastermind*ers had knowledge of 12 specialist subjects between them.

Afterwards *University Challenge* producer Peter Gwyn said: "This latest programme should put paid to claims that students are not as bright as they used to be."

University Challenge constantly throws up controversy about the student population of the UK as a whole, and questions are raised as to whether they could hold their own against their elders. By putting them against a truly formidable

team of *Mastermind* winners and finalists, I think we've demonstrated that the student population is as bright and well-informed as ever."

The Magdalen team comprised Jim Adams, the captain, who is studying mathematics and philosophy; Colin Andrews, who is reading philosophy and ancient history; English undergraduate Gwylim Thear; and historian Alison Reeves.

The *Mastermind*ers' team was captained by Colin Cadby, who was joined by Clare Oakwell, Andrea Weston and the final *Mastermind* champion Anne Ashurst.



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هكذا من الذم

And on the 13th day I took out a big loan

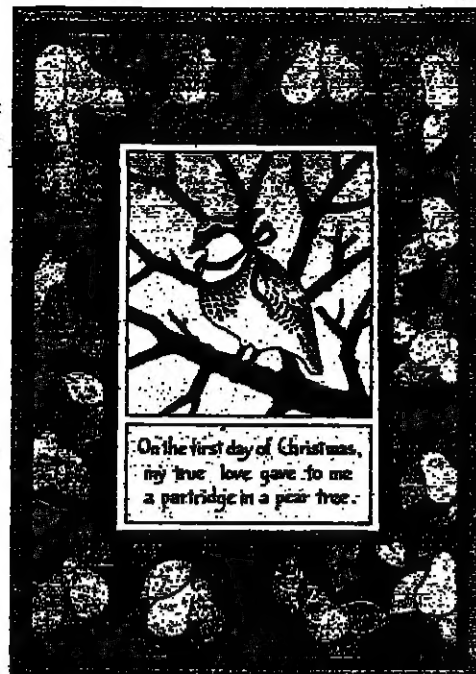
The outlay for the gift list in the song is steep these days, says Robin Young

THE cost of true love has more than tripled this Christmas. The total cost of the gifts catalogued in the traditional song *The Twelve Days of Christmas* has jumped like a lord a-leaping to £21,547.59.

Last year penny-pinching and bargain-hunting around Europe kept the total down to £6,028.93, the lowest since 1982. This year's shopping expedition reverted to traditional sources within Britain, and the result was the costliest declaration of love to date.

The *Times* has recalculated the sum each year since the World Wildlife Fund began the exercise in 1973, when the total was a modest £2,816.60. The course of true love having never run smoothly, this economic barometer has always been one of the most unsteady.

The list of presents suffers an avian overload, including no less than 184 birds. It is also liable to pressure from wage de-



COST OF THE TRUE LOVER'S CHRISTMAS

	1996	1997
A partridge in a pear tree, on 12 days	£38.90	£54.00
Two turtle doves, on 11 days	£97.46	£155.89
Three French hens, on 10 days	£327.87	£340.00
Four colly birds, on 9 days	£173.49	£275.31
Five gold rings, on 8 days	£646.23	£1,200.00
Six geese a-laying, on 7 days	£200.48	£1,830.00
Seven swans a-swimming, on 6 days	£1,046.23	£1,144.00
Eight maids a-milking, for 5 days	£3,360.48	£1,050.00
Nine drummers drumming, on 4 days	£88.56	£332.90
Ten pipers piping, on 3 days	£19.25	£1,608.00
Eleven ladies dancing, for 2 days	£29.98	£5,434.00
Twelve lords a-leaping, day's expenses	Nil	£414.00
Totals	£6,028.93	£21,547.59

mands, being a source of employment for 140 milkmaids, drummers, pipers, dancing ladies and leaping lords.

This year only the swans a-swimming and geese a-laying are cheaper than last year. The partridges (oven-ready), at £4.50 apiece, came from Gordon Hepburn, of Mountnessing, Essex, chairman of

the Guild of Q Butchers. Had the lovesick swain bought partridges from Harrods they would have been £5.95 each.

The pear trees were supplied by Hilliers of Winchester, at £17.99. The turtle doves present a problem because the species is protected in the wild. The true lover again opted for the closest approximation —

the most presentable white doves he could find. Tesco supplied the French hens (free range and corn-fed from the Landes) at £3.99 a kilo.

Alan Dawson, a supplier of aviary-bred colly birds (black-birds, which cannot be taken from the wild), has long told us that he never really sells any of those few blackbirds he

has. The true lover this year made an expensive switch to mynahs, according to Roger Caton, of the British Bird Council, they are £200 each.

Not many years ago gold rings were obtainable at £4.99 each; this year we could do no better than £40.75 for a lady's dress ring from Bravingtons. Geese a-laying became less

expensive because the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust has re-opened its barnacle goose adoption scheme, through which supporters can adopt

barnacle geese in the wild, and have free admission to trust reserves, for £17 a year. The cost of sponsoring wild Bewick or whooper swans a-

swimming through the trust is unchanged at £25 each.

With the human workforce, much depends on the attitude at union headquarters. This year the true lover agreed to employ milkmaids on overtime rates of 68.32 an hour, rather than getting stung for a weekly rate. Last year, he managed to get the girls at an hourly rate of next to nothing.

The musicians are another matter, and this year their union insisted on £13.40 an hour per man, with a minimum of four hours' per engagement, and an extra £10 a man for the drummers for the trouble of transporting their kit. Last year we drafted volunteer drummers from Ulster and bought CDs.

Equity's quote for 11 ladies dancing, drawn from the Royal Ballet, rose to £266.50, and they also demanded £17 each for the apparently necessary business of attending classes.

The lords a-leaping can usually claim the maximum daily expenses they could have if attending the Upper House, though last year they did it for love. Now they are entitled to £34.50 a man. Had they travelled in from the country and required an overnight stay the sum would have risen to £78 each, and if they could prove they needed secretarial assistance that would add £33.50.

Toy train finally arrives 22 years late

By KATHRYN KNIGHT

WHEN Guy Taylor found no train set in his Christmas stocking in 1975, the six-year-old thought that Santa had overlooked him. In fact, his letter to Father Christmas had been lost behind the seats of a steam railway carriage.

There it lay for 22 years, until it was found during cleaning on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway, West Yorkshire. Staff have tracked down the little boy — now a 28-year-old architecture student in Sheffield — and presented him with his toy set at last.

A spokesman for the railway said: "One of our repair men found the letter, which was a little crumpled but still intact. We run Santa specials every year and give out toys. We felt bad that one of our passengers had been forgotten and decided to make up for lost time."

Mr Taylor's family moved some years ago, but the new inhabitants still had a forwarding address.

Mr Taylor said he was delighted: "I'm the little boy that Santa nearly forgot."

Born Free Appeal

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America's huge rise in prostate cancer puts men in the spotlight

By NIGEL HAWKES, SCIENCE EDITOR

THE first research centre dedicated to male cancers is the aim of the everyman appeal of the Institute of Cancer Research. At Europe's largest cancer centre, in Sutton, Surrey, the institute intends to build a laboratory focusing on cancers of the prostate, testis, bladder and kidney.

As part of its annual Christmas Appeal, *The Times* is asking its readers to raise the money for a machine to study the genetics of prostate cancer. Behind this objective lie bigger ambitions — the study of all male cancers, and what they can tell us about cancer generally.

Professor Alan Horwich, Director of Clinical Research and Development at the institute and at the Royal Marsden NHS Trust, says: "Research on common cancers like cancer of the prostate has

been neglected, compared with that on breast cancer. My anxiety is heightened by what has happened in the US, and I believe will happen here.

"There, the introduction of screening for prostate cancer has led to a fourfold increase in the number of cases, so that prostate cancer is now the commonest cancer of all. I expect exactly the same kind of increase here.

"The big catch is that the outcome of prostate cancer is so uncertain. Some develop so gently that no treatment is necessary, while others move very rapidly into the rest of the body, especially the bones. If we just tell men that they have prostate cancer, many will have needless treatments, never mind the anxiety of the diagnosis. Those men would be better off not knowing."

The way around the problem, he

believes, is to identify the differences in individual cancers which determine how they behave. Genetic analysis of the tumours, for example, may reveal specific genes which are linked either to slow or rapid development.

Professor Horwich identifies three kinds of genes as candidates: those determining the rate of cell proliferation, those involved in correcting errors in DNA, and those determining whether a tumour cell can migrate to another part of the body and grow there, too.

For cancer of the testes, the emphasis will be different. This is one cancer which can often be cured by drugs: an 80 per cent cure rate is far higher than for most other cancers. Understanding why would be valuable because it might explain what is different about testis cancer which makes it, relatively, such a soft target.

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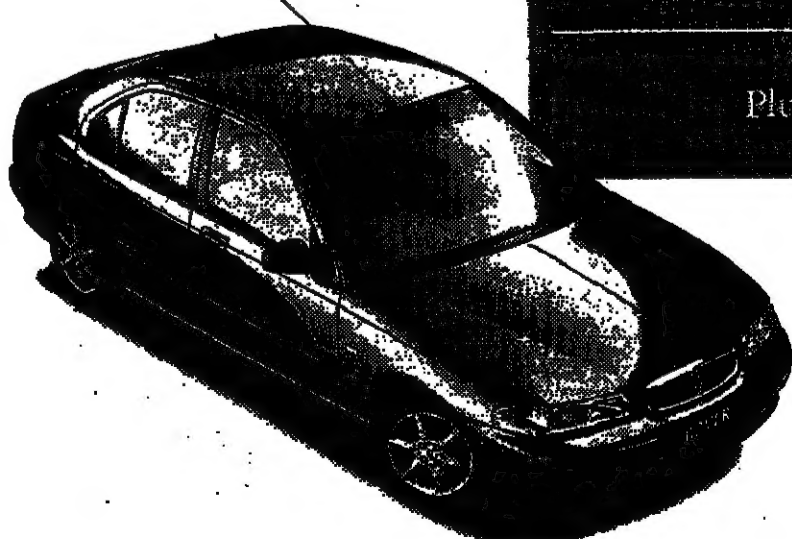
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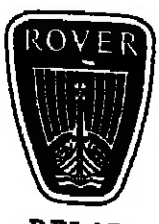
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RELAX.

French bra has fruity scent of success

FROM ADAM SAGE
IN PARIS

A DELICATE fruity odour will float from French lingerie next year in an attempt to stimulate what accountants prudently call the "night-time market".

With surveys showing a sharp decline in Gallic romance, and the manufacturers of slinky underwear bemoaning poor sales, a Parisian company has hit upon the idea of perfumed bras.

In the drawer, they are like any other garment. When worn, or "caressed", they give off an aroma of "pink grapefruit, apple, watermelon, blackcurrant and apricot", according to the firm. Neyret. "It's not the sort of thing you'd wear to work," said Michel Lévi, a director.

His venture was born out of frustration at recent stagnation in the Fr 10-billion (£1.6 billion) French lingerie market. The average French woman may buy two bras, six pairs of knickers and one nightgown every year, but this is not enough to satisfy firms such as Neyret. They note that British women now buy more lingerie.

Microencapsulation is the technique that enables aromas to be weaved into lingerie which will be on sale next year for between Fr 290 and Fr 500. "The aroma slowly emerges from thousands, even millions, of capsules. It is as if the flowers on our lingerie are giving off the smell," M Lévi said.

But there is a drawback. After one wash, the scent vanishes.

Knickerbox blow, page 19

Orphans of the Cold War defeat parents in US

THE strain of adopting Eastern Bloc children who turn out to have severe psychological problems is forcing a small but growing number of Americans to give up.

Doctors have evidence that up to a third of the children have chronic, irreparable brain damage, leaving them with low IQs, destructive behaviour and an inability to show affection for their adoptive parents.

The difficulties stem from the time the children spent from birth to well beyond infancy in orphanages in Romania, Russia and elsewhere. Kept in rows of cots, they received only a few minutes of human contact a day, were never cuddled and were starved of mental stimulation.

As a result, doctors say, their brain scans show large areas where there is no activity at all. "The effects of institutionalisation do not go away when families give a loving home," said Ronald Federici, a neuro-psychologist near Washington who has treated more than 1,000 children from Eastern Europe.

He accuses adoption agencies in America and in the countries concerned of misleading would-be parents by not warning them that the high-risk children will take a heavy emotional toll.

Among his patients were Russian twins adopted by a New Jersey couple. The dominant twin threw 30 to 30 temper tantrums a day and

Adoption cannot solve problems of the past, says Ian Brodie in Washington

tried to drown his brother. Sent to live with another couple, the troublesome twin attacked his new mother with a baseball bat. The boys now live in separate centres for troubled children.

Another couple who gave up were Kathy and Mike Ballou, of Kansas City, who paid \$25,000 (£15,000) for two-year-old Stefania from Romania, who they were assured was perfectly healthy. As soon as they saw her, they knew something was dreadfully wrong. Mrs Ballou confirmed yesterday.

Romanian plea to save children

Bucharest: President Constantinescu of Romania sounded the alarm yesterday over the plight of thousands of homeless children. In a TV address, he urged citizens to take responsibility for their welfare. "The plight of our children has earned us international notoriety," he said. (Reuters)

day. The child was mute, tried to chew furniture and licked the floor. She spun in circles, flapping her arms and banging her head. Mrs Ballou, a nurse, took her to a psychologist who found that she was probably autistic and a victim of retardation from foetal alcohol syndrome caused by her mother's heavy drinking during pregnancy. The Ballous visited doctors, took sick leave from work, sold their car and spent their savings of \$15,000 in medical fees before deciding they had no choice but to give up. Another family took on the burden. Mrs Ballou still regrets losing the girl, but said she was broke and "beyond exhausted".

Every weekend, Dana Hubbard, a Washington accountant, looks after two Romanian sisters, now eight and eleven but with mental ages of two and seven, just to give their single adoptive mother a break. On walks in a park, the younger girl tries to run up to strange dogs, no matter how often she is told they could bite. "It is heart-breaking for these parents who so badly wanted children," Mrs Hubbard said.

The flood of difficult cases is unlike anything seen in the 25 years that Barbara Holtan has been handling special-needs adoptions in York, Pennsylvania. At least once a month she is asked to find a new home for children from Eastern Europe. She said that there were no national statistics, but an



Children like this Romanian street boy can bring great grief to adoptive parents

estimated 20,000 children had been adopted by Americans since the end of the Cold War in 1991. A third are reckoned to adjust well and a third have some emotional or learning

difficulties; the remaining third have severe problems.

A support group, the Parent Network for the Post-Institutionalised Child, has 2,500 members. The organiser,

Thais Tepper, told *USA Today* that parents had called to say their adopted child was setting fire to the house. "These problems are adoption's dirty little secret," she said.

Yeltsin returns to face ills of country

FROM RICHARD BEESTON
IN MOSCOW

AFTER nearly two weeks away from his office because of a bad cold, President Yeltsin cut short his recuperation yesterday and returned to work for a few hours, to confront a mountain of waiting domestic problems.

Ignoring the advice of his doctors to stay indoors and rest, the Russian leader called a meeting of his staff in an effort to re-energise his administration.

"Coming back to work is the best medicine for the President," Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the presidential spokesman, said, adding that Mr Yeltsin managed three hours in his office before returning to his sanatorium outside Moscow, as previously agreed with his doctors. Although Kremlin officials are always at pains to emphasise how much work the Russian leader does at his country retreat, it is clear that during his latest absence several pressing problems have been left unresolved.

The priority for the President is to put renewed pressure on the opposition-dominated Duma, the lower house of parliament, to authorise next year's budget. The Bill, which passed its first reading only because of Mr Yeltsin's direct intervention on the chamber floor, has since been deliberately stalled by Communist deputies.

In normal circumstances, the budget delay could be dismissed as an annoying but predictable political issue. But today it is an aggravating factor in a financial system permanently in crisis. Taxes lie uncollected, wages are unpaid and there is a threat of a currency collapse in the new year, with the launch of a revalued ruble. The budget issue, therefore, will be likely to dominate talks on Friday between the President and the Speakers of both houses.

Judge gives jailed German tycoon freedom for Christmas

Frankfurt: The disgraced German property tycoon, Jürgen Schneider, was convicted of fraud and sentenced to jail by a Frankfurt court yesterday for deceiving the country's largest banks out of billions of marks.

Judge Heinrich Gehrke, who criticised the banks for making Schneider's fraud easy, said, however,

that he saw no risk that Schneider would flee the country and granted his wish to spend Christmas with his family. Schneider was neither a professional fraudster nor a Robin Hood of the property world, said the judge, who spent two hours reading the verdict in a crowded courtroom while Schneider, impeccably dressed

in a dark blue suit, watched impassively.

Schneider, 63, who has already spent 32 months in jail, broke down and cried outside the court after the judge said he would have to begin serving the sentence of six years and nine months after Christmas. He was convicted on charges of fraud and

document forgery in what has been called the biggest case of corporate deceit in post-war German history.

Schneider pleaded with the judge for a lenient sentence. He said that his banks, among them his largest creditor Deutsche Bank AG, tacitly accepted obvious irregularities in his loan applications because they be-

lieved his projects would make a profit. He fled Germany in April 1994 and, after spending a year on the run, was arrested in Miami, Florida.

He seemed to have a gift for refurbishing decaying city-centre buildings, and his efforts in Frankfurt and Leipzig earned lavish praise. (Reuters)

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return
to face
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China rejects call for Tibet referendum

FROM JAMES PRINGLE IN BEIJING AND JONATHAN MIRSKEY IN HONG KONG

CHINA yesterday rejected a call by the International Commission of Jurists for a United Nations supervised referendum in which Tibetans inside Tibet and abroad could declare their views.

"We perceive the producer of this report as being extremely ignorant of Tibet's history, and extremely ignorant of the principles of international relations and international law," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. "Since ancient times, Tibet has been an integral part of China, and matters concerning Tibet are China's internal affair. The International Committee of Jurists should stop interfering in China's internal affairs."

The lawyers accused China

of colonising Tibet and waging "total" war on the Dalai Lama. In its 365-page report the Geneva-based commission described Tibet as "under alien subjugation", and called for a UN-supervised referendum in which Tibetans could declare what they want: the commission noted this could lead to independence, "genuine internal self-government," or a continuation of Chinese rule.

The commission has studied Tibetan affairs since the 1950s, when it issued a report condemning Chinese rule in Tibet. "It is to maintain its alien and unpopular rule that China has sought to suppress Tibetan nationalist dissent and extinguish Tibetan culture," says the report's intro-

duction by Adama Dieng, the commission's secretary-general.

The report makes special mention of Beijing's "total war" against the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, and its eradication campaigns against his followers throughout the region. It claims that this campaign has intensified during the past year. The commission's report coincides with most informed opinion outside China. Although there is not a single similarity in language or social customs and organisation, Beijing maintains that Tibet has been a part of China for centuries.

Chinese historians often point to the good relations between China and Tibet in the seventh century when the Tang Dynasty emperor sent a princess to the Tibetan king as a sign of friendship. Actually, the Tibetans had recently sacked the Tang capital and the princess was dispatched to Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, as tribute.

In recent centuries, when emperors were devout lama Buddhists, the relationship between the Dalai Lama and the emperor was that of mentor and student, while the Chinese occasionally provided military protection to Tibet from other neighbours. Between 1913 and 1950, when Chinese troops invaded Tibet, there was virtually no contact between the two countries.



Dalai Lama: faces total war, lawyers report



Pedestrians pick their way among meat and other items at Cairo's crowded market during preparations for next week's start of Ramadan

Cairo crusader fights for new order

Michael Binyon takes a walk with Governor Shehata, right, who is bringing an end to the capital's chaos



Nile banks. Squares are being planted, cleaned, fenced and lit. The Governor said: "Our monuments are our jewel, but they are dirty and falling down. We're getting money from Unesco and world bodies to protect them — and I'll clean up the surroundings."

The Nile is his priority. "It is the most beautiful river in the world. With the Nile and moonlight you have all the romance you want." But first he must halt the effluent from drains and sewers, demolish the shacks along the banks, build a riverside walkway and move out the clubs, private restaurants and police posts. One such post in front of the British Embassy has already gone — under police protest.

He expects opposition, delay and bureaucracy. But the greatest challenge is privilege and corruption. "You must have discipline. That was how the pyramids were built. Egyptians like discipline."

Cairo has spent £5 billion on infrastructure in the past 25 years; he plans to spend another £1.5 billion in the next three. President Mubarak's Government may stand or fall by his efforts. Only by improving daily life in the capital can extremists be defeated, he insists. "Do we want a capital worthy of its name?" Many people, it appears, do. The walkabouts are his strength — and the corrupt and privileged know it and fear it.

PUSHING, jostling and grinning, they surrounded the grey-haired figure, reaching out to grasp his hands and thrusting dog-eared documents at him. "Salaam aleikum, Governor!" "You are welcome, sir. Please help me." An old man in pebble glasses and dirty robe pushed forward. "I need another job. I am old but I want to work."

A woman in a tightly-wrapped scarf produced a creased photocopy of the petition she had trailed from one dingy office to another. "Look, I have six children. They will not give me a bigger house. Tell them to listen."

Shopkeepers in the narrow alley beside the ancient al-Azhar mosque left their stools to crowd round the man who ordered the clean-up of Cairo's historic heart. "How is business?" he asked. "Not enough tourists," one replied.

Here, listening patiently under the bright street lights that he ordered to be installed only three months ago, was the one man who could dispense justice, frighten the bureaucrats and bring order to the reeling streets. He smirked at the outstretched hands. "Hello to all. Things going well?" "Hello Samir — you still here?"

Ibrahim Shehata, Governor of Africa's largest city, thumbed through the despairing evidence of poverty and struggle, noting the occasional name, passing tattered papers to a suited

official. "Come to the weekly meeting. We'll deal with it all there."

This was direct democracy in action. This is Cairo's astute reply to Islamic fundamentalism.

The late-night walkabout lasted an hour. Scores of clamouring Cairenes were by turn comforted, teased and reassured. A final stop to argue about a broken tree. "It's dying, Governor. Can't I cut it down?" the owner pleaded. "OK — but you must plant a new one at your own cost. There is a £200 fine for cutting down a tree."

"They are good people," he remarked later in his office. "The city is ungovernable — but we must have hope, and optimism. This is how I keep

in touch. People want to know that their rulers listen to them. Terrorism starts in these streets if no one cares."

Dr Shehata now controls a city of ten million people. The housing stock is decaying, the streets clogged, the grime, rubbish and dusty detritus of centuries an eyesore. He — and, it seems, eager supporters — insist that it can and must change.

His plan is ambitious and costly. Sixty-eight shanty towns will be given water, drainage and electricity. Contracts have gone out to private developers to clean up the urban slums, collect and recycle rubbish and refurbish houses. The city is to plant one million date palms along the boulevards and

Fourth victim dies in chicken flu scare

BY JONATHAN MIRSKEY

A FOURTH person suspected of having avian flu died yesterday as Hong Kong authorities suspended all chicken imports from China.

The woman, 63, was among three suspected and nine confirmed victims of the virus. She died of pneumonia.

The problem with the four children is that their grandmother is said to have scavenged for dead chickens in a rubbish tip where they have been discarded by butchers. No one has tested the dead birds and neither grandmother will agree to be tested.

Two market stalls have been closed because of virus traces in chicken droppings and all birds on the stall were destroyed. A dead bird in a wholesale market also tested positive. In neither of the markets was it possible to identify the source of the birds.

Chicken sales have dropped steeply and many families avoided the traditional chicken meal on Monday night, the winter solstice festival.

Some health officials are admitting, off the record, that the disease is being passed from human to human, although Dr Paul Saw, Hong Kong's Deputy Director of Health, said yesterday that this had not been confirmed.

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45 dead in Mexican villages massacre

FROM DAVID ADAMS IN MIAMI

MORE THAN 40 Indian peasants, including pregnant women and children, have been massacred by paramilitary gunmen in two rural villages in southern Mexico, according to Catholic church officials and peasant activists.

Details began filtering out from the remote region of Chiapas state yesterday after Tzotzil Indian survivors were rescued by Red Cross officials sent to investigate reports of bloodshed. Cipriano Villegas Apodaca, a Red Cross official, said 45 people were killed.

He said most of the victims were less than 18 years old, and that 19 people were wounded. Three children with gunshot wounds were taken to hospital in San Cristobal de las Casas, the nearest town about 45 miles away, a local radio station said. It said survivors saw women and children shot at point-blank range.

Church and peasant activists who are trying to piece together what happened, say that on Monday about 60 gunmen surrounded the villages of Ateal and Quexic, before opening fire.

"This is the worst massacre that has happened in Chiapas since the armed uprising of 1994," said Domingo Perez Palencia, president of the municipal council of Chenalhó, where the attack took place.

Kenyatta son pledges to restore freedom

TWO decades after the death of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first President and the revered "Father of the Nation", his son Uhuru is making a bid for political office.

Standing for the ruling Kanu Party in Sunday's general election, Uhuru Kenyatta, 37, hopes his reformist ideas can help to steer the discredited administration of President Moi back on course. "I want to breathe fresh life into Kanu and Kenya," he says.

But so far have standards slipped since the early days of Kenyan independence that vote-rigging and vote-buying are widespread, Uhuru — whose name is Swahili for "freedom" — has become a prisoner of a rotten system, handing out cash to woo voters. "Sometimes I have to do it," he admits. "I can't just

The son of Kenya's first leader is running for office with the aim of getting President Moi's discredited party back on track, David Orr reports from Thika

say "No, I'm not going to give you money". People expect it."

A businessman with interests in hotels, farming and horticulture, Mr Kenyatta is expected to win the seat for Gatundu South constituency of Thika, the place immortalised by Elspeth Huxley in her memoir of an African childhood, *The Flame Trees of Thika*. But it is unlikely that he can return Kenya to the prosperity of his father's day.

"My father would be concerned about the country," Mr Kenyatta says. "Public funds

have not been used as they should have been. Our infrastructure has taken a beating, our health service and education system too."

He is in an invidious position. He is contesting a constituency in the homeland of the Kikuyu, Kenya's largest tribe. In his father's day, this was staunchly pro-Kanu territory. Jomo Kenyatta, himself a Kikuyu, became leader of Kanu in 1960 while serving a sentence for his part in the Mau Mau anti-colonial uprising. But so disillusioned have the Kikuyu become with the ruling party under President Moi that Central Province is now resolutely anti-government. Kanu failed to win a single seat here in the 1992 multiparty elections.

"I'm on a Kanu ticket because of family ties and because I believe in the party's principles," Mr Kenyatta said in this coffee-growing town near Nairobi. "But if I crossed over to the [opposition] Democratic Party, I wouldn't even need to campaign. I could just stay at home."

Observers say the Government had to alter the former constituency of Gatundu, dividing it into north and south, to give Mr Kenyatta a better than even chance.



Uhuru Kenyatta as a child with his famous father

Fears for health as Pope misses Mass

FROM JOHN PHILLIPS IN ROME

THE Pope will not celebrate his traditional Christmas Day Mass in St Peter's Basilica tomorrow, Vatican officials said yesterday, reviving speculation in Church circles on whether he will be fit enough to make a historic visit to Cuba.

The 77-year-old Roman Catholic leader has kept his public appearances to a strict minimum recently. He did not attend a Vatican charity yuletide rock concert starring the guitarist B.B. King that was held in the Holy See on Friday. Vatican

sources have said that John Paul, who survived an assassination attempt in 1981, has appeared in better health recently than for several months. Yet when he visited the Spanish Steps in Rome for a ceremony to mark the Feast of the Immaculate Conception last month, he was unable to speak for several minutes because of the nervous affliction from which he suffers that is widely believed to be Parkinson's Disease.

His weekly general audiences for pilgrims in the Vatican have been suspended for three weeks to allow him

to rest. The Pope is scheduled to celebrate a solemn Christmas Eve Midnight Mass in St Peter's Basilica tonight. Tomorrow he is to give his traditional Christmas message and *Urbi et Orbi* (to the city and the world) blessing from the central loggia in St Peter's Square.

It is the third consecutive year that the Polish pontiff has cancelled his public Christmas Day Mass. Doctors judged his previous Christmas schedule too punishing. Vatican diplomats hope that the scaled-down schedule will mean the Pope can make his planned pastoral visit to Cuba between January 21 and 26.

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US writers sue over plot for Bond film

FROM TUNKU VARADARAJAN IN NEW YORK

THREE authors have filed a \$5 million (£3 million) lawsuit against MGM and the screenwriter of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, the new James Bond film, alleging that the plot and characters were "lifted wholesale" from an unproduced screenplay they wrote in 1994. The film pits Bond against a diabolical media mogul who sees world conflict as a means of boosting the ratings of his television stations. It opened in America last weekend in packed houses.

But Jeffrey Howard, Chris Beutler and Jay Schlossberg-Cohen claim, in papers filed in the United States District Court in Los Angeles, that they circulated their screenplay widely in 1996. They say that the recipients included Madeleine Warren, the wife of Bruce Feirstein, who penned the screenplay for *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

But Mr Feirstein told *Daily Variety*: "I was already working in London on the script after the story had been approved when they submitted their script to New Regency [his wife's company]."

Former British agent exposes Berlin spy ring

BY MICHAEL EVANS, DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

A SECRET spy ring known as the "Railway Men" helped British intelligence units to keep track of Soviet troop trains in East Germany during the Cold War, right up to the day when the Berlin Wall came down.

The Railway Men, ranging from East German station-masters to booking clerks, were recruited as agents to provide tip-offs about the movements of Russian troops on the extensive rail networks.

For British and other Western intelligence officers operating in Berlin during the Cold War, one of the key responsibilities was to monitor the railways and stay on the lookout for any sign of mass mobilisation.

Now former Captain Steve Gibson, who served in Soviet-controlled East Germany between 1988 and 1990 with a "special duties" intelligence unit — the British Command-in-Chief's Mission to the Group of Soviet Forces of

Occupation in Germany (Brixmis) — has revealed how much they relied for information on East German railway officials as secret agents.

The Brixmis teams were operating legitimately as part of an agreement signed after the Second World War in which the British and Soviet forces of occupation in Germany were allowed to exchange military liaison missions into their respective control zones. The Soviet version was called Sozmis.

It was legitimate intelligence-gathering, although it often led to violent confrontation with Soviet and East German counter-surveillance operatives who used to ram their vehicles off the roads and physically attack individual Brixmis members.

Former-Captain Gibson, who was one of the intelligence-gatherers who served as Nato's eyes and ears behind the Iron Curtain throughout the Cold War, was the last tour

officer for the British spying mission before the Brixmis team was withdrawn in 1990.

In a personal account of his secret operations, *The Last Mission. Behind the Iron Curtain*, (Sutton Publishing), on sale this week, Mr Gibson, 37, describes the dangerous cat-and-mouse games he and his fellow team members played while watching Soviet troops board trains and following rail shipments of tanks and armoured combat vehicles.

Yesterday he said that while signals intelligence operations and spy satellites helped to keep watch over suspicious Soviet troop movements, the East German Railway Men were crucial to the success of the Brixmis teams.

Previous accounts of Brixmis operations have not revealed how East German agents were recruited.

Mr Gibson's principal secret agent was an East German who "ran a big railway station".

He said: "I never met him but he supplied me with vital information about the movement of Soviet troops which saved us hours of fruitless searching for military trains."

Mr Gibson reveals that his station official was recruited by Major John Walker, a senior intelligence Corps officer. Members of the Intelligence Corps and SAS who operated at that time in Soviet-controlled East Germany used to wear "bland cap badges" like the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, to try to limit Soviet suspicion of their activities.

Mr Gibson said: "The important thing was to recruit anyone who had extensive



Steve Gibson, friend of Cold War trainspotters, at his Cotswold home yesterday

knowledge of military train movements. Some of the officials we recruited agreed to give us information because they wanted to get back at the Russians, to others we gave food and cigarettes, and to

some we gave money." The former intelligence officer also discloses that after the Berlin Wall came down, large numbers of Russian soldiers defected to the West, afraid of going back to the

Soviet Union because of the uncertain future they faced. Mr Gibson returned to Berlin in 1992 to help the Foreign Office deal with the "stream" of Russian officers who wanted a new life in the West.

US divers had nuclear bombs on their belts 30 years ago

FROM IAN BRODIE IN WASHINGTON

THE United States designed a lightweight nuclear bomb more than 30 years ago that could be strapped to the belts of navy divers or commandos parachuting behind enemy lines, according to newly declassified material.

Details of the James Bond-style device were disclosed yesterday when the Government lifted its curtain of nuclear secrecy for a rare look behind the Cold War secrets. Films released for the first time along with hundreds of thousands of newly declassified documents disclosed nuclear tests ranging from large explosions to hand-held weapons.

One film shows a navy diver clamping his 60lb bomb, called a Special Atomic Demolition Munition, to the hull of a ship, setting the timer and swimming away. The bomb was never used in combat but was in the US arsenal from 1963 until only eight years ago. It had a yield of less than one kiloton — 1,000 tons of TNT — but would have caused widespread radioactive contamination if detonated in a harbour. To this day, there are fears that such a weapon could be built by terrorists or fall into their hands.

Another nuclear weapon was a bazooka named after Davy Crockett, the American frontiersman. The battlefield atomic warhead could be launched by a single soldier using a shoulder-fired recoil-less weapon. It had a range of between one and six miles and was issued to infantry units in Europe and the Far East.

Eventually, the Davy Crockett was withdrawn, partly out of fear that the weapon could too easily be captured by an enemy and partly because of worries that radioactive



Official pictures show soldiers cleaning up after a nuclear blast and the crater from a test in Nevada



Official pictures show soldiers cleaning up after a nuclear blast and the crater from a test in Nevada

fallout would be too close to American troops. One film shows Robert Kennedy, then attorney-general, donning dark glasses to watch a Davy Crockett demonstration in Nevada in 1964.

At the same test site two years earlier, a nuclear bomb of 104 kilotons, nearly seven times the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, caused a spectacular explosion that was the equivalent of an

earthquake measuring 4.75 on the Richter scale. The blast displaced 12 million tons of earth, scouring out a crater 320 feet deep and nearly a quarter of a mile wide. The purpose was to determine whether atomic explosions could have a peaceful purpose in moving earth for mining, digging canals and creating harbours.

The test was one in a long series of detonations known as the "Ploughshare Project", most of them conducted underground. Although a technical success, the explosions-for-peace programme was never put into practice in the US. To test the effects of radiation on humans, pigs and other animals were used as surrogates. Footage of the experiments was described as "disturbing" by Federico Pena, the US Energy Secretary whose department released the material under the Clinton Administration's promise of more openness on nuclear issues.

He announced an end to the practice that all information about nuclear weapons is "born classified". Instead, he said, his department would only classify documents where there was a compelling national security interest. Indeed, there will be an even higher classification for all drawings and other data showing how weapons are designed and built, further evidence of Washington's concerns about nuclear terrorism. On the other hand, the Energy Department, which still oversees America's nuclear weapons research, will no longer classify information that deals solely with environmental quality or with the health and safety of its workers and the public.

Among the documents released were 270,000 pages relating to the vast off-limits nuclear reservation at Hanford in the Pacific northwest where nuclear reactors operated for almost 50 years to produce plutonium for US nuclear weapons, starting with the first atom bombs made for the Manhattan Project.

Overall, the United States conducted 35 nuclear explosions in 27 peaceful tests, compared with the Soviet Union's 173 explosions in 156 peaceful tests.

WORLD SUMMARY

Sweden's Queen of hearts

QUEEN SILVIA of Sweden revived a 79-year-old man who collapsed while speaking to her at a dinner in Stockholm (Victoria Fletcher writes).

The Queen, who celebrated her 54th birthday yesterday, gave Sten Rudholm a heart massage. She told guests that she knew what to do and would take care of the man, who suffered a drop in blood pressure. Mr Rudholm recovered a few minutes after the treatment, on Saturday.

18 arrested in Paris clashes

Paris: Eighteen people were arrested in Paris in the latest clashes after a week of youth violence. About 15 vehicles were damaged in battles between two gangs of 100 youths at Créteil, southeast of the capital. The area is notorious for juvenile delinquency and for fights between rival gangs, sometimes with ethnic overtones. (Reuters)

Catholics feud over cleric

Geneva: The Pope's appointment of Wolfgang Haas, a controversial traditionalist, to head the new archdiocese of Liechtenstein has triggered a feud between Roman Catholics and pinned the Government of the Alpine principality against its monarch, Prince Hans-Adam II, who supported the nomination.

Burundians given arms

Bujumbura: The Burundi Government said firearms were being handed out to civilians so they can defend themselves against increasing armed raids by Hutu rebels after reports that they have been attacking schools, abducting civilians and carrying out massacres in the west of the country. (AFP)

Malaria kills 143 in Kenya

Nairobi: A deadly strain of malaria has killed 143 people in northeastern Kenya in the past three months, Maurice Makharu, the provincial commissioner, said. "We had a serious floods here. Now they are subsiding and there are a lot of mosquitoes." (Reuters)

Paris statue for Churchill

Paris: The French are being asked to help to pay for a statue to be erected in Paris in honour of Sir Winston Churchill. The statue, to be sculpted by Jean Cardot, will be placed outside the Petit Palais museum near the Champs Elysees. (AFP)

Killer leopard is shot dead

Kathmandu: Hunters shot dead a leopard which has been terrorising a village for the past year, the forestry ministry said. The off-leopard was said to have killed 20 people, including 14 children, in an area 110 miles northeast of here. (AFP)

Escape Claus

Berlin: Three gunmen in Santa Claus outfits fled with money after raiding a gambling hall in the eastern German town of Friedland. (Reuters)

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Arctic rivals get steamed up in Santa war

FROM HILDA HELGA SIGURDARDOTTIR IN REYKJAVIK

ICELAND is in danger of losing a "Santa war" with its arch-rival, Finland, to establish itself as the undisputed home of Father Christmas.

Haukur Birgisson, head of marketing for the Icelandic Tourist Board, says of the new "Cold War": "I am calling a Santa crisis summit with interested parties early in the new year. There is no doubt that decisive action needs to be taken fast if Iceland is to reclaim Santa from the Finns."

With his own post office, radio station and aircraft, which bears his name and travels the world to spread

the message of "the world's only genuine Santa Claus", Finland's Father Christmas has the upper hand in the battle for the hearts, minds — and wallets — of Santa-followers the world over. According to the Finns, the Finnish Santa Claus lives in Lapland.

Icelanders say that, according to a recent survey, 50 per cent of American children believe that he lives either in Iceland or at the North Pole.

Iceland's only effort to justify that faith, however, consists of a small home page on the Internet, run by a private company which offers users the chance to create their own personalised message from Father Christmas for £3.60. "It is not a lost war," Mr Birgisson says, "but we have slept on

our guard. The trouble is that marketing Santa requires a long-term strategy as well as a lot of money, and Icelanders are better at getting brilliant ideas than following them up."

One "brilliant idea" was dreamed up by an Icelandic travel agency a few years ago. It was to build an "International Santaland" in the small south coast town of Hveragerdi, until then famous only for its greenhouses. The marketing campaign to attract lovers of Father Christmas from all over the world began in November of that year, by which time most winter holiday-makers had made other plans. Visitors were few.

It cannot have helped that because of the area's geothermal heat, so helpful

to growing vegetables, it is rare to see snow there.

Another reason for Iceland's lacklustre performance may lie in the fact that the Father Christmas idea has competition there. The jolly, bearded figure of cosmopolitan tradition is doing battle with indigenous "Christmas men". They are 13 laddish chaps, bearing names such as "Stiff-legged Sheep Chaser", "Shorty", "Door Slammer", "Candle Beggar" and "Sausage Snatcher", who start descending from the mountains in early December, the last one arriving on Christmas Eve.

These Yuletide lads have strong roots in Icelandic folklore and little to do with the Mediterranean saint who is Father Christmas's forerunner.

هكذا من الشمال

Miraculous escape by Britons in jet crash

By Christopher Thomas, South Asia Correspondent

A PLANELOAD of 89 people, half of them Bangladeshi expatriates from London, were amazed to be alive yesterday after the aircraft crash-landed in a rice field, skidded 500 yards and stopped in a cloud of smoke with one wing torn off and the undercarriage wrecked.

Their apparently miraculous escape happened as the Biman Bangladesh Airlines Fokker 28 was coming in to land. "The plane has been badly damaged. It's a miracle that the passengers and crew survived despite crash landing," said Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, state Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism after visiting the crash site and hospitals. "Those injured are also not in serious condition."

The domestic flight began from Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital. M. A. Mannan, the pilot, said the aircraft hit an air pocket at low altitude while he was preparing to land. It came to a halt in the dark two miles from the airport in marshy ground, but it took two hours for the authorities to confirm its whereabouts because radio contact was lost before the crash. More than 55 people, including Captain Mannan, were injured and

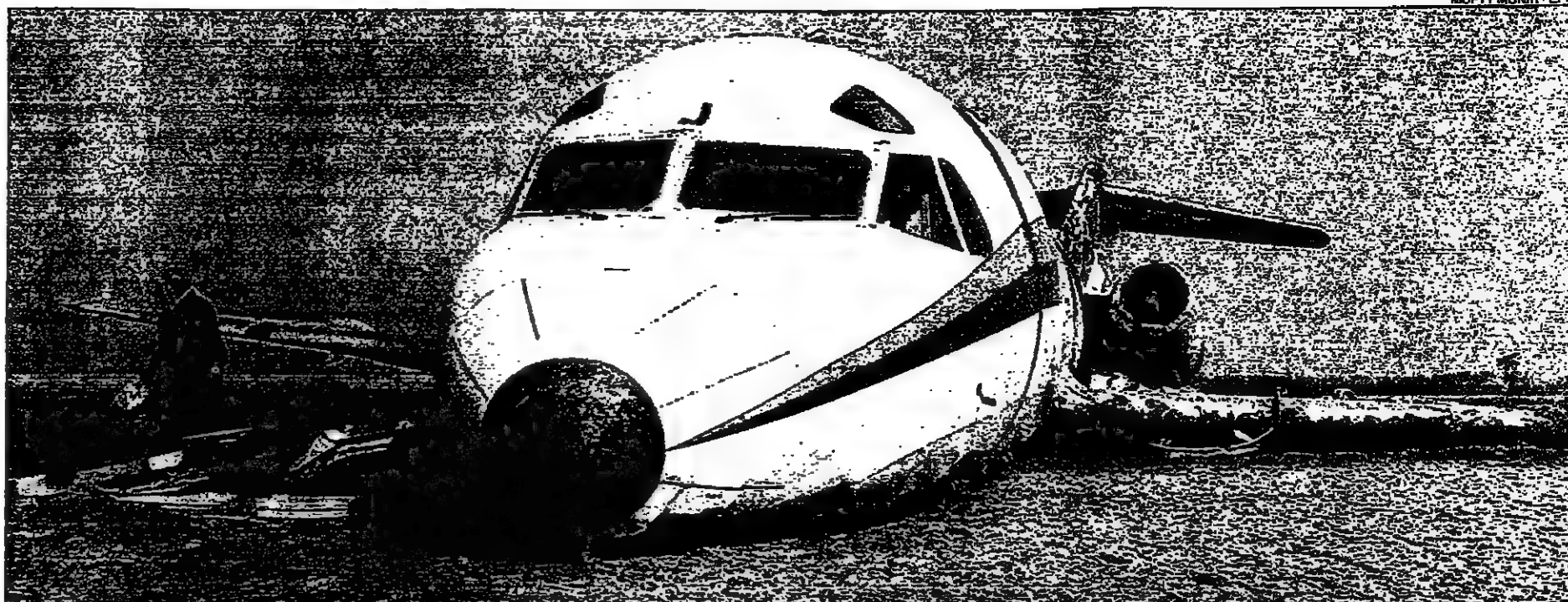
four crew, were detained in hospital.

At dawn, rescuers renewed their search of the wreckage for survivors, and were stunned that nobody had died. Hundreds of villagers and soldiers from a nearby army camp helped to free the passengers.

Airline officials said the passengers and crew would not have survived if the plane had caught fire. "It is sheer luck that the plane did not burst into flames," said one. "That is why the passengers were saved from almost certain deaths."

Tara Miah, one of the passengers, said visibility was poor because of fog as the aircraft came in to land late on Monday. She felt a sudden jerk. "We knew something had gone wrong. Many started screaming and calling for Allah's help. Soon we saw we had landed on a paddy field in the dark," she said.

Iqbal Siddiqui, a newspaper reporter who visited the crash site, described the plane as "ducking into a rice field with one of its wings broken and two of its wheels dug into the mud." Captain Mannan said he used the emergency exit in the cockpit after the aircraft



Wreckage of the Biman Fokker 28 yesterday after it crash-landed near Sylhet in Bangladesh. Officials said passengers would not have survived if it had caught fire

had "roughly hit the ground and I saw myself bleeding from the nose". He said: "The aircraft appeared to have been strongly pushed by stormy wind soon after I had issued the announcement for land-

ing. And it went beyond my control."

Many owners of Indian restaurants in Britain — hardly any of them are run by Indians — originate from the Sylhet area because of a

tradition of supplying cooks for the Royal Navy. Many settled in Britain after the Second World War, when Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan, and the aircraft's expatriate passengers were

travelling to visit relatives for the holiday. Bangladesh has a tiny Christian population but Christmas is widely acknowledged, if not celebrated, and many expatriate Bangladeshis traditionally return to their

roots at this time of year. An airport official at Sylhet, 150 miles northeast of Dhaka — a hilly region prone to fog — said the aircraft had made several attempts to land in poor visibility before belly-

landing. The airline acquired the aircraft in 1981 and it was said to be airworthy. Wing Commander Aminur Rashid, the airport director, said that an investigation had been ordered.



Jaime Jaramillo with Hanna, a child with Down's syndrome he rescued from parental cruelty

Mission of mercy for Colombia's street children

In a world gone wrong, Jaime Jaramillo is one man who has tried to make a difference. One Christmas Eve, he found out just how wrong things had become and the encounter was to change his life.

That day he was strolling in the Colombian capital, Bogotá, when someone tossed a gift box out of a passing car.

A little girl raced to pick it up, thinking there might be some valuable object inside, maybe even a discarded Christmas present. Her eyes met Señor Jaramillo's and spoke for a moment of sheer joy. But she failed to see an oncoming lorry bearing down on her. She was smashed against the pavement.

"I felt as if I had killed her because I had distracted her attention," Señor Jaramillo recalled. To add to his grief, he found that she had died for an empty box.

From that time, when I saw that broken body, I realised I was meant to help street children," he said. Immediately he set about being an instant Father Christmas, distributing about 200 inexpensive gifts until sunrise.

He was then 16 years old, a university student in engineering. "I made up my mind to give ten children a solution within a year," he said, and began placing them in different families, who acted as foster parents.

Based on his own parents' teachings, he supplied the street children with tools to earn a living. "It was amazing. I gave them shoe shine boxes and they started becoming an example for the rest of the people," he said. "I gave one an old bicycle and he started to deliver newspapers."

After that promising start he went to study abroad, but resumed his work with the children when he returned. At the same time, he set up his own company.

It was only slowly that he began to learn of the true plight of the street children, who used to hide in the sewers to avoid death squads, hired by the Government and business people to wipe out what they saw as hope of redemption. The campaign of "social cleansing" forced the children

A lost generation in Bogotá is being offered salvation by a remarkable man, writes Ross Dunn

underground. "It was a good place to hide, but if the inferno of Dante exists, the living hell, then it is the sewers because the children had to live between rats, mosquitoes and leeches," Señor Jaramillo said. "Their survival depended on how high they could keep their heads above the human waste."

After slipping many times himself in the sewers and swallowing the filth, he began using specially designed Scuba equipment, including a miniature tank.

Even that was not always enough to avert tragedy. "Once, I was inside the sewers holding a couple of children and suddenly water came rushing in," he said. "I lost my grip on one of them."

Slowly, a small group of volunteers was formed to join him in the rescue patrols. "The children never turned me away, never," said Señor Jaramillo, 42. "They are looking for love because most of them were raped, thrown away from their homes."

By 1988, he decided to formalise his work by setting up a charity, La Fundación Niños de los Andes (Children of the Andes Foundation). He was also helped by oil company executives, who gave contracts to some of the teenagers.

Señor Jaramillo believes that about 1,500 children have been rehabilitated since he began his mission. They include Luisa Catalina Cuellar, 15, who said: "Life in the streets is like a jail. The day I decided to come to the foundation was when one of the children in my group was murdered. 'Sometimes I cry with happiness because I found beautiful people who love me. I am now only starting to live my real childhood.'"

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How I found faith



Catherine Lucas was an atheist, scornful of belief and pitying of believers, until a moment of revelation

Not long ago, I was walking in Hyde Park when I bumped into a friend I had not seen for ages. During the conversation I mentioned something about the spirit. He listened for a moment or two and then asked, in absolute astonishment: "Catherine, have you become religious?" I sensed he would have been less shocked at the possibility that I had become a prostitute or a drug addict.

Hastily I reassured him that I had not, then felt guilty for betraying what I have become. So I added: "At least not in a conventional way. But I do believe we are all connected by spirit." From the expression of alarm on his face, I could see my explanation was not going down well, so we parted company.

His thoughts I can only guess at, but mine were clear. Why, I wondered, do I feel such acute embarrassment at publicly admitting my "spirituality"? How, as a society, did we lose our belief and respect for religion to such an extent that it has become a social suicide?

Until one day a couple of years ago, I was in the countryside on my own and had spent several glorious summer days walking in the hills. One evening I was sitting quietly when suddenly everything around me dissolved. It was like dropping through a trap door into darkness and I found myself in what I can only describe as a sea of sparkling energy. I was conscious but nothing, including my body, had any form or structure.

At first I was astonished and then I realised that whereas before I had experienced the presence of God in all things, this

found it awe-inspiring. I soaked up the magnificence of the rocks, the trees, the mountains and the light above them, so shatteringly clear.

I felt a tremendous sense of joy and realised that if this beauty was in everything around me, in every scrap of matter, then it must also be within me. My heart broke open and my soul leapt free, existing in this moment of interconnection. Then I went home and forgot about it.

At least I thought I did, except that I now had a mysterious hunger for the soul. Something deep within me came to the surface that summer, bringing with it a longing that I could neither name nor satisfy. The only time I felt peace from it was in nature, where I re-experienced the joy of union and the feeling of expanding into the infinite.

One day it dawned on me that this joy was a spiritual experience. I was horrified. But the feeling was so powerful and the logic so overwhelmingly simple that my intellect had no chance to defend itself. For the first time I understood the presence of God in everything.

Not that this made it any easier to accept. My rational mind was outraged and civil war broke out between my head and heart. Over several years my experiences of the presence of God grew stronger. But this only intensified the conflict, because I still did not understand what God is. I could not get past the idea of an old man with a white beard up in Heaven, and was torn between the undeniable truth of my experience and the doubts and taints of my disbelieving mind.

Several years of compulsory church attendance at school did nothing to kindle my faith, and when I finally escaped from formal religious education, I assumed my dealings with God were over. Then, at 18, I spent three weeks hiking in the mountains of Oregon. It was the first time I had seen such beauty and I

found it awe-inspiring. I soaked up the magnificence of the rocks, the trees, the mountains and the light above them, so shatteringly clear.



Vision of angels: "Because of the tyranny of doubt in our society, to speak of God is to risk becoming an outcast"

was God. At least, this is what people call God for the sake of calling it something. Finally I understood that God is not an old man in the sky. It is a limitless ocean of consciousness, of unmanifest energy, and the source of everything in existence from the largest planet to the smallest insect.

Gradually things rematerialised and, although they were exactly the same, I was completely different. Suddenly everything made sense. It was like watching the sun sail out from behind a cloud — the light was there all the time, but now I knew its source and everything became more radiant.

The understanding of God is a feeling of coming home in the fullest sense, of finally knowing one's true nature, because everything we experience, from joy,

love and acts of genius to pain, grief and destruction — all come from this source. And knowing this has taught me to be grateful for every breath.

This is why the loss of faith is so devastating to our society, because we no longer have a way of recognising and celebrating what is precious and sacred. It is only when we experience a crisis such as the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, that we see the appalling emptiness of our lives. Or at Christmas, when our pursuit of the material and the meaningless reaches its peak and yet does nothing to satisfy our deepest needs.

So, contrary to my expectations, believing in God has nothing to do with arrogance. Instead it creates true humility,

because it reminds us that everything we are is thanks to God, that we are each a speck in the divine whole. And it is certainly not a crutch, because admitting our divinity demands that we give everything.

I would like to say it has been easy since that moment of revelation, but it has not. I have found that it brings an awesome responsibility. For it is not enough to live an ardent but secret spiritual life. It forces one to come out of hiding and own it publicly — to allow the divine to shine through and, as Buddha said, to "make of thyself a light". Or, as Christ instructed, to "stand and testify".

That brings me back to my conversation in the park, for clearly I am still struggling against my conditioning. When I think of the prophets, writers

and the millions of ordinary people who have been willing to share the truth with others, I know it is an honour to join them. But I also know, because of the tyranny of doubt in our society, that to speak of God is to risk becoming an outcast.

Christmas is a good time to speak of God. Nowadays I appreciate Christmas far more because I understand the truth in Christ's teachings and I may well go to church to honour his birth. But to me, it is more important to practise what Christ and all the other great prophets preached: to love God above all else and to share that love with others. This awareness allows me to enjoy every aspect of Christmas, and reminds me that there is something far more precious than presents or turkey and Christmas pudding.

Another episode of NYPC blues

Tunku Varadarajan has a bleak midwinter

Six pairs of eyes bored into me as I took my leave at the door. Heads turned, too, even in the far corners of the room. The small party, hitherto convivial, lapsed suddenly into a sulk. I had broken one of New York's cardinal rules of political correctness. I had said "merry Christmas".

"Happy holidays," my hostess riposted with well-bred froideur. "Happy holidays," said everyone else in a kind of collective hear-ear designed to plunk me in my place. "Happy holidays," I grumbled.

Let me explain, for puzzled readers in Britain, that one is no longer allowed to say "merry Christmas" in New York. It is strictly, utterly, totally, absurdly, mind-bogglingly forbidden. Of all the many cards I have received this year from Americans, not one mentions the word Christmas. Each one, infuriatingly, bangs on about this absurd thing called "the holidays".

Merry Christmas is now deemed to be too Christian by the "secular McCarthyites" who patrol the boundaries of modern American culture. There are also Jews to be considered, and Muslims, Hindus, Confucians and atheists: so the greetings card police have decreed that the "sensitivities" of these groups must not be trampled on by hooligans baying the word "Christmas".

I am ashamed to reveal that even the cards prepared for *The Times's* bureau here conform to local specifications. This is what they say: "It's a real pleasure at this holiday time to wish you a full year of happiness and prosperity." Sickened by this capitulation, I have taken to crossing the message out and writing a proper Christmas greeting in its place.

But mine is a lost battle. "Shock-horror" Christian symbols such as crèches and scenes of Bethlehem are absent from the windows of department stores. In a desire not to offend non-Christian groups, Bergdorf Goodman, the Fifth Avenue luxury store, has this year featured a display of "legends, goddesses, heroines and divas".

It is worse still in the multi-ethnic classrooms of *fin-de-siècle* New York. Take the case of Packer Collegiate, an affluent prep school in Brooklyn. A friend who sends her small daughters there tells me they have abolished the end-of-term Christmas pageant and replaced it with a "winter sing".

My friend went last week to see her seven-year-old perform. The hall was packed and the programme was conducted by the school's "diversity co-ordinator". Naturally there were no Christmas carols at this "winter sing" thing: no *Silent Night*, no *Away in a Manger*. Instead, flabbergasted parents heard their offspring render a Congolese harvest song, a Sephardic birthday tune, several "native American" items and a song about cats.

I mentioned this to Bill Donahue, the president of the Catholic League, and he said: "That's typical. There is an intoxication now with multiculturalism in its most perverted form. Everyone tries hard not to offend the other religions, but no one cares at all if Christians are offended."

Christmas was once an uncomplicated period in New York. I, as a child who went to school in the city in the 1960s, can recall taking part in nativity plays without teachers worrying about my parents' "Hindu sensibilities". But Christmas has now become a prolonged tightrope walk for paranoid New Yorkers. To carol or not to carol? To greet or not to greet?

Holiday schmoliday, I say. For Heaven's sake, bring back a proper Christmas.

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Working mums, big bad bosses and the tender gender trap

I ALWAYS get uncomfortable about cases that women bring against employers on the strength of — or weakness, it seems disputed — of their being women. No one appears to be able to get it right. We want to be treated as workers, irrespective of our sex. And yet we seem to feel that a certain amount of respect is due on that very account.

I'm not being Backlash Betty about all this. It's true I feel embarrassed fairly often about the whingeing of the sisters, who have no shame in presenting themselves as coarse 1940s reworkings of Victorian maidens, clutching

hunkies and suing employers for offending their natural delicacy. But to reduce feminism to the militantly pathetic, almost paranoid poor-me brigade would be, to me, just as unpalatable. For this reason, I am uncharacteristically cheered by Natasha Walter's *The New Feminism*, even if I feel that those who write feminist strategies for childcare before they have children are at an irredeemable disadvantage. Anyone can be a good feminist before they have children. It is after, when it is for real, that it gets difficult — and more interesting. And it is the children

thing, here, that has come up again.

A former policewoman is suing her former employers for failing to consider her duties as a mother. She was asked to work at short notice when neither her husband nor her babysitter could mind the baby; her inspector refused to change the rota accordingly. She cites discrimination. Her employers suggest that, since many in the police force, men and women, have children and continue to manage, she simply couldn't cope. The former policewoman declares this "an insult". She claims — and this is meant to bolster her case — that the incident left her "punicky and suicidal". And so it goes on.

Instinctively I balk at the charges of emotional overload, but there is a real — and possibly intractable — difficulty here. Female employees rightly mind when they are

Nigella Lawson



Office frolics

IT OCCURS to me that we no longer really celebrate Christmas but, rather, have returned to the more ancient rituals of Saturnalia — which, you will remember, was when the servants were allowed to rampage riotously about the place at the expense of the masters — which the Christian festival usurped. I make this remark not because I am struck by the godlessness of the season (as a Christmas-celebrating atheist, Jewish to boot, I am hardly in a position

not given the promotion they feel that they deserve because they are pregnant or have children. It is not, they state, for their employers to worry about their personal obligations to their children. So how can we then demand that our employers take those obligations into account when it suits us?

And yet, clearly, those with children (and notionally, at any rate, this is true of both male and female employees) do have to find some way of reconciling their domestic duties, their home life, with their work schedules and they — we — are never going to be able to do this satisfactorily without the compliance of employers. The fact that people do manage — as the plaintiffs' employers point out — is only partly an excuse. But I'm not sure one can expect much more. Life is hard, and while we should expect to be treated fairly if not sensitively for the latter, one should have nothing but gratitude. It can never actually be our employer's job to make it easier.

IN THE past it has been said that what we are really celebrating is the New York Jewish Christmas — that is to say, the whole American mall thing: bright lights, too much tinsel, the entire sugary, sentimental commercial package. Well, Christmas — the rituals rather than the reason for it — is not just for Christians (and see above) but I had not realised quite how far melting-pot ecumenicalism had gone. I now do. Selfridges food hall stocks a kosher Christmas pudding. Beyond parody, that's how far.



Party on: Christmas, once a family occasion, increasingly focuses on the office

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Joe Joseph and Grace Bradberry give some seasonal advice on children, trees, party games, food and last-minute gifts

Christmas off the cuff (or how to cope in an emergency)

ADULTS ARE, relatively speaking, easy to deal with.

Every aunt, if fed enough liquor, becomes amusing. If not, pour yourself more liquor. Daddies are trickier. Do what I did last year — I bought an aged, almost deaf uncle a Walkman and told him it was a revolutionary new hearing aid. Plug the earpiece into his ear — but first tell him that you want to remind him of the plot of *Moby Dick*. Then insert into the Walkman a tape of Martin Jarvis reading *Moby Dick* and hope that your uncle thinks he is listening to you taking him through the story. This can keep him occupied for up to six hours (not suitable for uncles prone to seasickness).

Children are more difficult to amuse once the excitement of present opening has died. While young children may make their own

DEALING WITH RELATIVES

mess, they don't make their own entertainment, which puts the burden of ingenuity on the adults. Stopping them causing havoc is the main challenge: the low point usually comes when you discover that the Tracey Emin tent your wife bought you for Christmas after seeing it in the Royal Academy's *Sensations* exhibition has been invaded by eight children who are holding a cowboys and Indians tea party in it. The dispiriting aspect of children is that their enthusiasm for the trappings of Christmas is still bubbling brightly long after your own has waned. If their general mood of optimism starts grating, why not teach them that life has its downside, too, by taking them into a quiet room, and fleeing them at poker? In my experience, children can never remember whether a flush beats a full house.

DECORATIONS

CAUGHT short on Christmas Eve because you can't find the tree decorations you gently wrapped up in tissue paper last January, carefully packed into a large box, carried up the ladder, pushed through the hatch and then hurled into a dark corner of the attic?

Never mind: improvise. Professional florists charge wads of cash for strings of dried red chillies and slices of orange that they have shoved in their Agave overnight. You could do the same. Or sew together a long string of shiny Quality Street chocolates and drape it around the tree (do not use M&S: they just make a mess when you try to push the needle through them).

Other colourful food-stuffs work just as well, such as popcorn, chopped-up squares of leftover Dorset's pizza (pepperoni adds a splash of festive red), chips that have been dipped in tomato sauce (more festive colour) and spinach fettuccine, cooked *al dente* and then hung over branches of the tree (no pasta sauce, obviously).

Lazily draped fried eggs can create an intriguing Dali-esque effect. Use stiffly beaten egg white, cream cheese or crème fraîche (full fat, the low fat doesn't keep its consistency) on branches as fake snow. Caster sugar, sprinkled over the tree from above, is also good. (Tip: mayonnaise may look fine initially as fake snow drifts, but it soon yellows, turning into goblets of ochre and making your tree look like an enormous cotton bud that has been used to scrub out a giant's earwax.)

Obviously, beef on the bone is out this Christmas, decoration-wise. But carrots are colourful, if you can find them still attached to their stalks (handy for hanging them up), and also make a healthy snack for peckish family members.

Lights are a trickier proposition. However, try to lay your hands on a few flashing rear bicycle lights — at least if they fuse, they won't blow the whole house.

FAUX CRACKERS

YOU KNOW you have joined the underclass when you cannot afford crackers. It is the sort of thing that can scar a family's collective memory for generations, such as *The Time We Drank Liebfraumilch*, and *The Christmas We Dug Up Our Tree From The Side Of The Motorway*.

So you forgot. Who will believe you? Far better to talk airily about a rebellion against the commercialisation of the festive season, then back the remark up with some impromptu creativity.

First visit your chemist and buy keyrings for the men, and lipstick or nail varnish for the women, thus ensuring that your crackers will at least be personalised. Next, pop to the garage and buy chocolates and sweets, before making the paper hats, following the diagram on the right. Now you must write the jokes. In strictly adult company, you can let rip. Otherwise, use the following, which more than fulfil the seasonal need for sub-standard humour.

What do you call a girl who stands between two goalposts? *Annette*. Why did the robber take a bath?

GAMES YOU CAN PLAY

1. EVERYONE'S name (this game assumes that players know each other) is written on slips of paper, put into a hat and mixed up. Every player then picks out a name (if it is their own, they must return it and pick another). On another piece of paper, each person writes down the most irritating trait of the person whose name he has plucked from the hat, then puts this new piece of paper in the hat. These character sketches are then picked out of the hat and read aloud: players win one point for guessing who is being described, and two more points if they are courageous enough to suggest who wrote the description. These point totals are trebled if both parts are guessed correctly by the person who is actually being described.

2. Players divide into teams. Each team then begins a limmerick, which the other side has to complete. Points are awarded for topicality, wit, satire and vulgarity. Here are

a couple to set you on your way:

*When William got married to Effie,
And honeymooned in the Caribbean,
His first night was bliss,
But she dreamed of Pops.*

*I once knew a Paymaster General,
Who faced a political funeral,
His big trust was offshore,
Which he never foresaw.*

3. General knowledge quiz. You don't necessarily have a deck of cards handy, but you always have cash — or at least an IOU. Challenge other players to answer questions for specific amounts of cash.

Even naming all the planets becomes exciting if there's £50 riding on it. To get you going, here is a guaranteed money-spinner: Which lies farther east, Edinburgh or Carlisle?

ROTTEN TURKEY

YOU RETURN to the house this afternoon to find that a foul odour has percolated through the house. Upon investigation you discover that your favourite auntie has surreptitiously turned the heating up in every room, including the kitchen. The pantry, hitherto freezing, is now lukewarm. So is the turkey. So warm is it, in fact, that you would fear it had been resuscitated but for the macabrous stench of rotting giblets. Your uncle will now have a perfect excuse for his annual performance of *Christmas Day In The Workhouse* — a tradition you had hoped to scotch once and for all.

What to do? You arrive at the supermarket at 4.30pm. Every turkey, not to mention every goose and duck, has been swept from the shelves. If you are lucky, there will be a few packs of unseasonable ostrich, now relatively common. Failing that, beef or lamb can both be roasted with pretty much the same trimmings. Beef should be roasted for 20 minutes in the hottest oven possible, then 20 to 25 minutes per pound at 190C, gas mark 5. If you have a leg of New Zealand lamb in the freezer, then cover it with rosemary and roast it at 200C, gas mark 6, for 20 minutes per pound, plus 20 minutes to finish. Half an hour before the end pour 200ml/7fl oz of red wine over the top, then make gravy using one tablespoon of fat, brown stock and a teaspoon of redcurrant jelly.

And so, this done, you wake on Christmas Day, smug in the knowledge that yours is an unusual and tasty Christmas feast. Worse is in store. Your 13-year-old niece, Evie, arrives at midday, her complexion white, her eyes puffy

and ringed with red. The previous day she had her first encounter with a vivisectionist — and read his wretched pamphlet. Meat is off the menu. For ever. Her mother also fears she may be anorexic. It is imperative that you provide tempting vegetarian fare — and quickly.

Luckily, it is possible to knock up Cordon-bleu soufflés with the ingredients in your store cupboard. First, halve an onion and place it in a saucepan with a pint of milk. Add a bayleaf and simmer, then strain the milk. Next melt 2oz (50g) of butter in a pan, stir in 2oz (50g) of self-raising flour and cook for one minute. Add the hot milk gradually, stirring continuously. Thicken the sauce slightly and leave on a very low heat for three minutes.

Pour the sauce into a large mixing bowl and beat in four size 2 egg yolks (save the whites). If you have any chives, snip them up and add a tablespoon to the mix. Stir everything together, then fold in 6oz (175g) of mature Cheddar cheese chopped into very small cubes. If you have any sun-dried tomatoes, add a handful, chopped, to the mixture at this stage. Whisk the egg whites to the soft-peak stage and fold them gradually into the cheese-and-egg mixture. Divide the mixture between eight buttered ramekins, place them in a roasting tin and pour boiling water around them. Bake them on a high shelf at 180C, gas mark 4, for 15 minutes until they are springy. Cool them, then chill until needed. Finally, remove the soufflés from their ramekins and place on a buttered baking sheet. Chop up 2oz (50g) of goat's cheese and sprinkle on top. Then cook at 200C, gas mark 6, for 20 minutes or so.

PRESENTS

FORGOTTEN cousins, your children's newly acquired and hitherto unmentioned boy-friends/girlfriends, work colleagues who pitch up on Christmas Eve — it seems there is always someone on the doorstep expecting to be pried with last-minute gifts.

In such situations head for chemists', 24-hour garages and off-licences. The former usually have scented candles (great for maiden aunts), and those disposable cameras that provide some entertainment for even the stroppest adolescent. There are underwater versions (children might enjoy using these in the swimming pool) and some with built-in flash. It doesn't matter if the recipient owns a £2,000 Leica — a throwaway camera will always be popular for New Year's Eve parties because it can be lost with impunity. A decent garage should be able to supply packs of five blank videos — always useful. If these options fail, try the off-licence for a bottle of champagne, or pop down to the cinema and buy two tickets for the dead period between Christmas and new year or, even better, a voucher.



Children are more difficult to amuse once the excitement of present opening has died. Stopping them causing havoc is the main challenge

THE SUNDAY TIMES

GLOBAL PARTY

Make your plans to celebrate the millennium. This Sunday, our 16-page Travel special features the best parties and events around the world to mark the year 2000

THE SUNDAY TIMES IS THE SUNDAY PAPERS



A BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

'When the fullness of time was come God sent forth His Son...'

As the march of months to the millennium becomes more insistent, so too does our awareness of time moving and passing. From birth to death we are creatures of time, shaped by a period of years — by the age into which we are born, and by the past of family, nation and history, that has formed us in ways both conscious and unconscious. To be without the marking of time is to lose our identity. To live simply in the present is elusive and illusory. Our history, our story, is woven into the fabric of our lives. We find our identity by telling our story, the story that is ours alone to tell, but which can only be told in its intersection with other stories, other personal patterns of meaning and purpose. So we find ourselves persistently propelled on a quest to find an overarching story in which we may discover our full meaning and identity.

Year by year, just before the year's turning, we tell the story of a birth — the birth of Jesus, whose name means Saviour, and who is called "the Christ", the "anointed one" of God. But uniquely the story of that birth is told not as an obituary notice or a biographer might tell it, but as Gospel — "Good News" — told from the perspective of an ending that is not death but resurrection, when death itself was blown open to the overwhelming hope of a new order. God's new creation.

The Greek words for time used in the New Testament are *kaiairos*, the moment of significant time, of promise, of change and challenge, and *chronos*, the regular, rhythmic ticking of the clock, the steady, inevitable elapse of sequence. To discern the *kaiairos*, to find not just sequence but history, is to see beneath the surface to a deeper significance and movement. So St Paul speaks of the *kaiairos* of Jesus's birth in a powerful metaphor, as the moment when the fullness of time was come, the *chronos*, the regular patterning, crowds and comes to a full. Just as Hopkins thus saw his life like sand in an hourglass, so time itself comes to a moment like a birth. For this moment of incarnation is the defining moment of time. From it we measure the millennium. In it we measure

our own days. For that birth is the story which gives meaning to our lives. And why? Because that story is the story of the appearing of the One who created time, within time. It is no less than the self-emptying of the divine love into the heart of human history, expressing in that self-giving the love for which time and history were made. In this way, choosing to stand where we are, being born as we are born, coming into our world with all its ambiguity, knowing creation from the inside, God wills to draw us to Himself, from the darkness of sin into His marvellous light.

The New Testament celebrates that wonder and that mystery, in a rich variety of ways. It is the meaning behind the simple story of a birth in the dung and straw of an outchouse at Bethlehem; it is the song of praise of the angelic armies of Heaven, who had shouted for joy at creation; it is expressed in the humble response of faith of Mary, the village girl of Nazareth, in and through whom God comes into the world; it is behind the worship of shepherds, and the pilgrimage of wise men.

To those who say that so much of the familiar Christmas story is embroidery, we must needs reply that such embroidery is what embroidery always is, an enhancement in beauty of an underlying pattern and meaning. The meaning of this story we indeed know only in part, seeing through a glass darkly. For the truth of the incarnation is a love which was lived. And it is a truth we likewise know only by living.

For if God has indeed made us for Himself, there is no more truly human way of living than by the following of Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit. It is for this that God's grace is poured into our hearts, and received in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Over again the dark night wakes, the glory breaks and Christmas comes once more, drawing us by its magic and its mystery to put our life's trust in the reality of the God who came to us at Bethlehem and took us by the hand. O Holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today.

BAD TIDINGS FROM THE EAST

Korea and Japan threaten a 1930s-style depression

While Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and the rest of us enjoy our Christmas holidays tomorrow, politicians and bankers in two of the world's most important industrial economies will be burning the midnight oil. In Japan and Korea financial markets are open for business over Christmas. But this year, it will be anything but business as usual. Both Korea and Japan are facing financial crises on a scale which the world has not witnessed since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Korea's predicament was candidly described yesterday by Kim Dae Jung, the country's President-elect: "We don't know whether we will go bankrupt tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I cannot sleep since I was briefed about the country's financial situation. I am totally flabbergasted." This disarming frank remark immediately wiped 14 per cent off the value of the Korean won and 7.5 per cent off the Seoul stockmarket. But it seemed an honest reflection on the country's desperate state.

The 60 per cent devaluation of the won since November has pushed Korea down from the level of Spain to that of Turkey in the world's economic ranking. More importantly, it has destroyed the country's entire financial and business structure. Banks and industrial conglomerates which had eagerly borrowed "cheap" dollars and yen in the international markets have faced a doubling of the value of their foreign loans in terms of won. Since they now have no hope of repaying their enlarged foreign borrowings, Mr Kim's reference to impending national bankruptcy was all too apt.

In Tokyo, meanwhile, the Nikkei stock market average has just closed for the first time in years below the 15,000 mark. If it breaches the low-point of 14,200 established in 1992, perhaps as soon as Christmas morning, it could set off a chain reaction leading to the insolvency of up to half Japan's major banks, which are additively

dependent on stock market profits to keep themselves afloat. With insolvent banks calling in their loans to commercial borrowers, the consequence could be an economic depression comparable to the one that hit America after 1929.

To make matters worse, the Japanese and Korean financial crises are closely intertwined. If Korean conglomerates fail to repay their foreign borrowings, the biggest losers will be the shaky Japanese banks. And if Japan continues to slide into depression and cuts back its imports, the biggest losers will be the over-indebted Korean conglomerates.

Something needs to be done quickly to stop this vicious circle. Fortunately, solutions to both the Japanese and Korean crises are at hand and perfectly clear to everyone outside Japan and Korea. The Korean Government must take responsibility for the foreign debts of its banks even if this means temporarily renationalising the entire banking system. Japan must act even more boldly, since it can afford to do so. The Japanese Government must close down its insolvent banks and repay their depositors with public money. Simultaneously, it must announce dramatic tax cuts to restore public confidence and encourage Japanese consumers to spend money.

Both Japan and Korea are fundamentally strong economies with enormous scope for rapid growth. Sooner or later they will re-emerge as two of the world's leading industrial countries. But America was a fundamentally strong economy in 1929. This did not prevent it from suffering a decade of financially-induced depression. In a depression, government policy must heed Franklin Roosevelt's famous advice: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself". So far, the Japanese and Korean governments have been too paralysed by fear to act rationally. They must stop panicking and start acting.

A PLACE FOR PROTOCOL

The case for caution when modernising state visits

When protocol and spin collide which should take precedence? The decision by the Foreign Secretary to "modernise" state visits by downplaying tradition, emphasising the go-ahead and drafting in a personal propagandist reflects Robin Cook's understandable annoyance at the negative reporting of the Queen's visit to India. It was not just Mr Cook's *amour propre* which suffered. The Queen did not escape whipping from some commentators and valuable trade initiatives were overshadowed. There are clearly lessons to be learnt from the episode, but Mr Cook should realise that protocol, like armour, may inhibit flexibility but it affords protection.

State visits have, generally, added lustre to the country's reputation and provided the Queen with an opportunity to fulfil her role as ambassador with aplomb. Over time a tradition of delicately choreographed personal contact and studiously apolitical speeches have created favourable mood music which allows the prosaic business of international problem-solving to be conducted more harmoniously. A jarring note

was struck in India by the prominence given, through no fault of Mr Cook's, to his private diplomatic efforts to help with a resolution to the conflict in Kashmir. It was not an excess of protocol that offended, but an activist diplomatic stance.

Mr Cook apparently believes the India trip was blighted from the beginning by the decision to visit during the fiftieth anniversary of independence. Determined that such errors should not harm future contacts, he wants to give the Foreign Office a greater role in planning state visits, at the expense of Buckingham Palace. Mr Cook has already, however, chosen to blame the last Government for planning the trip ineptly. He cannot keep his mud and fling it.

If it was the Tories' fault that the trip was badly conceived, then the Palace does not deserve the implied rebuke of seeing its role limited in future. In any case, the traditional practices which he fears look "imperial" are the particularly gracious habits of monarchy which buy Britain's politicians a respect abroad that endures long after landslides have been eroded.

Labour 'despair' at welfare proposals

From Mr Frank Allau

Sir, It is with dismay that I write this letter. The effect of the Government's plans for lone-parent families and the disabled, blind and sick has been so disastrous amongst Labour supporters — not to mention the victims — that I am convinced that the proper course is for both measures to be withdrawn (letters, December 9, 13, 17, 18, 23).

In many constituency Labour parties the vote against them has been unanimous. If the Bills ever reach the statute book the shame will never be forgotten. The lone-parents' Bill has had its third reading, but if the Lords amend the Bill it will have to come back to the Commons. The second plan has even more time to be scrapped.

I know men and women who have waited hard and sacrificed for the Labour cause for the whole of their lives who are now filled with despair. "Have we wasted our years for this kind of thing?" they ask. Our front bench must know this very well. And to crown it all our leader tells us there is worse to come. If so it will destroy the Labour Party.

Yours sincerely,
FRANK ALLAU
(Labour MP, 1955-83),
11 Eastleigh Road,
Manchester M25 0BQ.
December 22

Royal finances

From Mrs Jennifer Miller

Sir, Valerie Elliott's report ("MPs win scrutiny of royal accounts", December 18) describes the latest episode in the harassment of our monarch over finances which has been going on for years. Meanwhile her Civil List has remained fixed at £7.9 million, although the Crown Estate profits quietly pocketed by the Treasury in exchange rose last year to a record £102.9 million.

What happens to this vast and increasing source of government revenue taken from the Queen, and where are the detailed published accounts of its expenditure?

Yours faithfully,
JENNIFER MILLER,
2 Heathview Gardens,
Putney, SW15 3SZ.
December 18

From Mr Edward Hay

Sir, There is something rather farcical about the Public Accounts Committee spending so much time examining the Royal Household's accounts. £40 million of "taxpayers' money" is an infinitesimal figure placed beside, say, the Defence budget of £20 billion.

It is hard not to believe the fuss is being orchestrated for political reasons: to ensure headlines for otherwise unknown Members of Parliament.

Yours etc.
EDWARD HAY,
16 Worfield Street, SW11 3RD.
December 18

Leaders and led

From Dr P. H. Borchers

Sir, In his letter on one member, one vote in the election of the Conservative leader (December 19), further letters December 22 is Sir Julian Critchley not making the mistake of assuming that those attending the Conservative Party conference reflect the views of the party membership?

His description of the conference reminds me, if one replaces "Right" by "Left", etc. of meetings of the council of the Association of University Teachers (AUT), membership of which is determined by ill-attended local meetings (perhaps like membership of the Conservative conference?).

I have served on the national executive of the AUT for several years. Elections to it are by a ballot of all members. Its views are closer to those of the members and much less extreme than those of the council. Perhaps the same is true of the Conservatives.

The greatest problem is to persuade sufficient members to vote, so as to prevent the organisation being dominated by an unrepresentative minority with extreme views.

Yours sincerely,
P. H. BORCHERS,
71 Swardmore Road,
Birmingham B29 4NH.
December 22

Maxwell connection

From Mr George Depotex

Sir, As another of the many hired and fired by Robert Maxwell (letters, December 10 and 18) I know that it would have been impossible for anyone to have worked for him in a responsible position without knowing that he indulged in sharp practice. Newcomers to Pergamon were warned to count their fingers should Maxwell shake them by the hand.

When the truth was finally known an ex-colleague summed it up by saying that while we all knew he was a rogue, no one knew how crooked he really was.

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE DEPOTEX
(Pergamon Press, 1968-74),
40 Camden Hurst, Pless Road,
Mildford-on-Sea SO41 0WL.
December 19

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN Telephone 0171-762 5000

Protect children from a life of crime

From Lord Hylton

Sir, The House of Lords debated and gave a second reading on December 16 to the Government's Crime and Disorder Bill (letter, December 16). This measure reforms youth justice and is intended to help prevent anti-social behaviour and actual crime among youth and adults.

There are two points in the life of a child or young person which should give warning signals to all concerned and thus make the Bill more effective. The first occurs when a pupil is suspended, perhaps later expelled from school, because he or she has become so unruly and disruptive as to hamper the education of others. It is then essential that alternative education or training is provided so that there is no gap inviting the expellee towards a lifetime of crime.

The second is the point at which a child is taken into the care of the local authority. We know that in 1996 there were over 51,000 such children in England. Some of them offend while in care and others drift into crime when they emerge from care and enter a harsh adult world. It is no secret that there have been scandals and lapses affecting children in statutory children's homes. Foster placements and adoption can be successful, but do not always work well.

The inability of the school or the natural family to cope should call for co-operative action by relatives, neighbours, voluntary organisations and the appropriate agencies of local and central government. Early-warning

systems would make such co-operation easier and more successful.

Every effort should be made to prevent young people becoming institutionalised and thus prepared for a lifetime of unemployment, homelessness, hospital and prison.

Will the Government ask the new Social Exclusion Unit (report and leading article, December 9; letters, December 15) to examine urgently the breaking points mentioned above for both schools and families, because it seems that only a multidisciplinary approach will suffice?

If the agenda of the SEU is already overloaded, will the Government commission an independent study of these areas of pressing need?

Yours faithfully,
HYLTON,
House of Lords.
December 22

From the Minister for Home Affairs

Sir, The Crime and Disorder Bill will introduce the most far-reaching reforms of the youth justice system since the war. The specific measures which Frances Cook's letter highlights were the subject of extensive consultation both in opposition and in government and will equip the criminal justice system better to improve the quality of life for people in this country.

Yours sincerely,
ALUN MICHAEL,
Home Office,
Queen Anne's Gate, SW1H 9AT.
December 17

Privacy defended within a free press

From the Director of Charter88

Sir, Terry Waite is right that press freedom is to be defended (report, December 15; see also report, December 17) — and the Government's Human Rights Bill contains a clause that will do just that. The Bill brings into British law the European Convention on Human Rights, already accessible to British citizens through the courts in Strasbourg.

Article 10 states that we have "the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas". This has been used by the press to protect its right to publish stories that the Government and others have tried to suppress, from the revelations about thalidomide in the 1970s to the *Spycatcher* memoirs of 1987.

Terry Waite knows more than most of us how powerful a tool the media can be as a force for good. By publishing information about Waite, and about other hostages, the press helped to keep their case in the public eye.

But surely when they returned home, our need to know about their

lives came to an end? We no longer needed to have reporters stationed on doorsteps, harassing their children, or using telephoto lenses to sneak a photo of a private moment. We needed to respect their privacy, and give them time to adjust to normal life after their ordeal.

The most powerful element of the Human Rights Bill is precisely this balance between the public's right to know on the one hand and the individual's right to privacy on the other. If the rights of the individual are to be protected against irresponsible journalism, newspapers cannot be exempted from the legislation.

In any case the Human Rights Bill, together with the Government's proposed freedom of information legislation, will do more to protect press freedom than constrain it.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW PUDDPHATT,
Director, Charter88,
Exmouth House,
3-11 Pine Street, EC1R 0JH.
December 17

Soldiers and HIV

From the Chairwoman of the Josephine Butler Society

Sir, How is it that after all the recent education, men still hold women with whom they consort responsible for the transmission of sexual disease (reports, December 16, 17, 19)? Do men really refuse to take responsibility for their actions, even today?

When Josephine Butler campaigned against the Contagious Diseases Act in the 1870s, women were held as being the half of a couple which needed state regulation to ensure their cleanliness for men. Heaven help us all if commanding officers still think this way.

Perhaps the CO at Caterick who is so concerned about his soldiery should provide condoms and teach their usage *pdq*.

Yours faithfully,
VALERIE GORE, Chairwoman,
The Josephine Butler Society,
Beals Place Farm,
Canterbury, Kent CT2 8HX.
December 20

Dutch Army proposals

From Mr Hans van den Heuvel

Sir, Proposals for recruiting 16-year-olds into the Dutch Army, referred to in your report of December 5, do not emanate from The Netherlands Ministry of Defence, and were clearly refuted by the minister in Parliament on December 11. The Government has also rejected the suggestion that qualifications for the fast-reaction force should be lowered.

I also wish to refute your reporter's statement that the Dutch Armed Forces suffer from a "shoddy image". The Netherlands has had all-volunteer, professional Armed Forces since September 1996; defence personnel are expected to exhibit a sense of responsibility, discipline, tolerance, flexibility and respect; and a stringent policy with respect to misconduct and the use of drugs is enforced. Those who violate this policy are fired.

The Netherlands Armed Forces are professional, highly motivated, and well-suited to their tasks, as illustrated daily by the excellent co-operation between British and Dutch military personnel in Bosnia under Sfor.

Sincerely,
HANS VAN DEN HEUVEL
(Director of Public Information),
Ministry of Defence of the
Kingdom of The Netherlands,
Postbus 37001,
2500 ES 's-Gravenhage,
The Netherlands.
December 12

Doorstep ban

From Mr Lesioq Bowerman

Sir, Before the minister bans the doorstep (letters, December 12) he should pay a visit to 2 Willow Road in Hampstead, the house built by the architect Erno Goldfinger in 1938-39 for his own use and now open to the public.

It appears to be more or less untouched since the family lived there, except that the floor covering on the ground floor has been renewed.

The house has a level entrance and no step. When I visited it recently it had a line of sandbags along the front to keep out the rainwater.

Yours faithfully,
L. C. BOWERMAN,
27 Theford Road,
New Malden, Surrey KT3 5DP.
December 20

Rembrandt diagnosis

From Mr A. M. Phillips

Sir, Carlos Espinel, "a professor of cardiology and an amateur art historian", sees in Rembrandt's self-portrait of 1659 a collection of symptoms of disease and degeneration that leads your headline writer to call it "Portrait of the artist as sick and sorry old man" (report, December 19).

In the season that is upon us it is not untimely to reflect that the spiritual whole is a blazing triumph over the sum of its physical parts.

Yours faithfully,
A. M. PHILLIPS,
Lycidas, Doggetts Wood Close,
Chalfont St Giles HP8 4TL.
December 19

Good Evans

From the General Secretary of the South American Mission Society

Sir, I note with interest in today's Church News the appointment of the Right David Evans as honorary Assistant Bishop of Birmingham.

I am grateful the right David Evans got the job rather than the wrong David Evans or even the left David Evans.

Yours, as the Right Reverend,
DAVID EVANS,
General Secretary,
South American Mission Society,
Allen Gardiner House,
12 Fox Hill, Birmingham B29 4AG.
December 22

Letters should carry a daytime telephone number. They may be faxed to 0171-762-5046. e-mail to: letters@the-times.co.uk

Faith that crosses religious divides

From the Reverend Johanna Boeke

Sir, As a Unitarian minister, I recently performed a marriage ceremony for a Dutchman (I am Dutch by birth) and an Israeli woman, and attended the reception in Tel Aviv. I was delighted to see the warmth and acceptance the bride's parents showed towards their daughter's husband.

At the reception most of the people I met were Jewish. But the Jewish identity of some of them is in question as the result of a struggle between Orthodox rabbis and Reform and Conservative rabbis.

It saddened me, during my brief visit, to encounter yet another religious chasm. It saddens me even more the Archbishop of Canterbury insisting that Prince Charles, when crowned King, will have to promise to be "Defender of the Faith", rather than "Defender of Faith" (report, November 29). Dr Carey's argument is that the UK is a Christian nation, not a multi-faith nation. As such, "the Faith" presumably means Church of England.

Last year I attended a lecture given by the Archbishop at Lambeth Palace to the World Congress of Faiths. In it he asked: "How can we travel together in interfaith dialogue?" His answer was that "We can journey together as friends, but our stories are not the same." I agree.

But now I am disappointed. It may be true that only 10 per cent of the British people are of other faiths, but shouldn't their right to those faiths be defended? Shouldn't a king defend the diverse faiths of the Commonwealth nations?

Many couples come to be married in a Unitarian Church who, when asked "What is your religion?" answer, "Oh, I suppose, Church of England." But when I ask "Do you attend a church?" they say, "Not really, we are not really practising."

Are these the people whose faith Prince Charles is to defend? Yes, they seek some sense of the sacred. They seek to share the bonds of faithfulness, but in a universal way. The Prince would prefer to be "Defender of Faith". Perhaps that is not enough. Perhaps the new title should be, "Defender of the Practice of Faithfulness".

Yours faithfully,
JOHANNA BOEKE,
Forest House,
Winterpit Lane, Mannings Heath,
Horsham, Sussex RH13 6LZ.
r.boeke@virgin.net
December 22

Museum charges

From Sir Hugh Leggatt

Sir, Would it not be a noble gesture if all our public museums and galleries allowed free admittance during the Christmas and New Year holidays for children and adults alike?

Yours faithfully,
HUGH LEGGATT,
Flat 1, 10 Bury Street,
St James's, SW1Y 6AA.
December 18

Stocking fillers

From Mrs Sue Calt

Sir, Mr Alasdair Maclean (letter, December 20) asks why the mouse in the Christmas stocking? — perhaps the answer lies in

"Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
No creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

As the mouse was made of hard sugar and took longer to consume, it was just buying a few more minutes of precious peace in the morning.

Yours faithfully,
SUE CALT,
St Nicholas Lodge, Back Lane,
Blakeney, Norfolk NR25 7NP.
December 20

From Mrs Ann Hughes

Sir, I suggest that, in the days when there were holes in the waistcoat, the original mouse put himself in the Christmas stocking, attracted by the nuts, fruit, food and chocolate (much better than cheese for baiting a mousetrap).

Yours faithfully,
ANN HUGHES,
Twin Oaks, Oak Farm Lane,
Fairseat, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 7JU.
john.hughes@compuserve.com
December 20

From Dr Tom Tate

Sir, The presence of mice is inevitable. Last year, they polished off Santa's mince pie and carrot, had a go at his whisky, and I have no doubt, investigated the stockings. Not a creature was stirring — excepting the mice.

Yours faithfully,
TOM TATE,
Snowfield Cottage,
Beardsted Green, Kent ME14 4DL.
t.tate@ic.ac.uk
December 20

From Mr Richard Carlyon

Sir, The presence of the mouse is easily explained: it is to assist in the production of personalised, word-processed, thank-you letters.

Yours faithfully,
R. J. CARLYON,
Hogarth Cottage,
North Street,
Somerton, Somerset TA11 7NY.
December 22

OBITUARIES

WITOLD RODZINSKI

Witold Rodzinski, historian and diplomat, died in Warsaw on December 19 aged 79. He was born in Poland on October 8, 1918.

In 1960, when Dr Witold Rodzinski presented his credentials as the new Polish Ambassador in London, British officials were surprised to find that he and his wife Jenny both spoke perfect English of the American variety. In fact, he was the son of a distinguished musician, Artur Rodzinski, and had been educated internationally: childhood schooling in America, high school in Poland, and then at Columbia University, where he took a history degree. As for Jenny, whom he had married in 1941, she had grown up in the Ukrainian community of a Pennsylvania steel town.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Artur Rodzinski was conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at the Carnegie Hall. He announced the news and signalled to the orchestra to strike up *The Star Spangled Banner*. It is said that every young man in the hall enlisted the next day. One who certainly did so was the newly-married and newly-graduated Witold.

He became a bomber pilot and was posted to the base in Corsica immortalised in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*. Later, Rodzinski always insisted that the book was a faithful documentary, devoid of fantasy or exaggeration.

In his youth, and much to his father's displeasure, he had become a dedicated Communist. At high school in the 1930s in Zakopane (southern Poland) he had taken serious risks by smuggling illegal

pamphlets across the mountains from Slovakia. In later life, when he acquired a remote cottage in these mountains, he still knew all the footpaths. His special interest was Chinese history, and his only political heresy was a belief that Mao Zedong, and not Stalin, had been strategically right in 1927. In 1947 he returned to a devastated Poland, along with Jenny who had never been there. He took up a lectureship at Warsaw University, but the Communist Party authorities decided that he could be most useful in a different capacity, and in the 1950s he served as press and cultural attaché in the Polish Embassy in Beijing. There he learnt to speak good Mandarin and laid the foundations of a fine collection of Chinese scroll paintings.

After a period back in academic life, Rodzinski was dispatched to London, where he was Ambassador from 1960 to 1964. Although he carried out his duties scrupulously, he had become disillusioned with the intolerance and dishonesty of the Communist system. Friendships made in Britain, notably with Denis Healey and Michael Foot, drew him to an appreciation of democratic socialism.

Since his wife and two daughters were with him, he considered staying in this country at the end of his tour of duty. However, he could not reconcile himself to the role of defector and the plaudits of the capitalist press.

Pucked yet again from university teaching, he was back in Beijing, this time as Ambassador. While he was there, the Cultural Revolution broke out: Rodzinski was able to perceive the distress it caused to the Foreign Minister, Zhou En-



lai. A main target of the Red Guards was the "revisionism" of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Embassy was surrounded night and day by screaming mobs. The Russians decided to send their wives and children home, but it was far from certain that they could get safely to the airport, or indeed from their buses to the plane. Rodzinski organised

and personally headed, a volunteer force drawn from the staff of various embassies. Roughly played from the British Embassy came forward with enthusiasm. But it was a day of real danger and, though the operation was successful, Rodzinski ended up with a broken arm. Eventually, the Soviet Union broke off relations with

China, and Poland, of course, followed suit. With great relief, Rodzinski returned to Warsaw University and to working on a massive, two-volume history of China, which he wrote in English. But he was now considered politically unreliable, with suspicious links with the West. He was never given a professorship and was gradually nudged into early retire-

ment. There were also delays in producing a Polish version of the history. The two volumes, as written, appeared in London in 1979 and 1983. Unfortunately on the advice of Labour Party friends, the author entrusted it to Pergamon Press, owned by Robert Maxwell, and never got his full royalties.

A revised version, condensing the two volumes into one, entitled *The Wall of Kingdom*, was published by Collins in 1984. It was recognised as a standard work and is used in university teaching in many countries. Rodzinski followed it in 1988 with *The People's Republic of China*, a fuller account of the conflicts and upheavals since Mao took power in 1949. Written from careful research and some inside experience, it had few rivals in its field. Respected in British scholarly circles, especially in Cambridge, Rodzinski revisited this country several times and was Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall.

In personal terms, Rodzinski endured much unhappiness. His much-loved younger daughter, Irina, lost her life in a mountain accident in 1974. Witold and Jenny both suffered illness in later years. He had been attacked by tuberculosis on his first day in China and, after various operations and treatments, was left with only one lung. His eyesight also deteriorated until he could scarcely read; he was sustained by his love of music and a great record collection. He had, to rare degree, the character of a scholar. It was history itself — the violent history of the 20th century — that imposed on him the burdens of a man of action.

He is survived by his wife Jenny, and his daughter Alexandra.

HENRY CHARNOCK

Henry Charnock, CBE, FRS, meteorologist and oceanographer, died on November 27 aged 76. He was born on December 25, 1920.

WHEN Henry Charnock joined the wartime Royal Air Force, weather forecasting was an art illuminated by the science of meteorology. Numerical forecasting had been adumbrated by I. P. Richardson two decades before, but the computers needed for its practical achievement were still far away. The science needed for the construction of successful models, particularly of boundary layer interactions, had yet to be done. Similarly, when he joined the embryonic National Institute of Oceanography in 1949 at the invitation of its first director, George Deacon, physical oceanography was very much a pioneering discipline based on a few measurements made with simple apparatus on special expeditions or from ships of opportunity.

Charnock played an important role, both as a scientist and as an administrator, in helping to bring both subjects to something like maturity, with the processes of the ocean and atmosphere being understood both broadly and, in some aspects, in detail. Weather forecasting by computer is now routine, as is the prediction of the short-term behaviour of water movements in shelf seas. Scientific understanding and the use of credible climate models incorporating both ocean and atmosphere have now convinced many nations that they need to reduce the production of greenhouse gases and ozone-depleting chemicals.

Henry Charnock left Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Blackburn, at 16 for a job in a gas-mask factory. After studies at night school and technical college he took a London University external degree. When war came he joined the Royal Air Force. When it ended he was forecasting for the RAF in Iceland, having been sent there when he failed to predict weather that froze in the flying-boats on Lough Neagh. He anticipated official arrangements by hitching a ride home in a trawler.

After the war he went to Imperial College to study meteorology under Peter Sheppard. There he gained not only a firm grasp of the science but also a group of friends who would last and be influential for the remainder of his career. It was there, too, that he started the work on turbulent interchanges in the oceanic and atmospheric boundary layers that was to be at the core of his personal scientific achievement.

He was to return to Imperial College for a short spell in 1958-59 as a Reader in Physical Oceanography but he found himself uncomfortable, he later confessed, because the post seemed to have no specific duties. This was followed by a three-year stint as head of the oceanography group at the Sackler laboratory at La Spe-

zia and then, in 1966, by his appointment as Professor of Physical Oceanography at the University of Southampton. When Sir George Deacon retired in 1971, Charnock seemed his natural successor as Director of the National Institute of Oceanography, although he made it clear that he would accept the appointment only if the Natural Environment Research Council maintained the institute's fully interdisciplinary character. He had to reassess this position a number of times over the next few years.

In 1973 the research council decided to merge two of its smaller marine laboratories with the National Institute of Oceanography, under Charnock's direction, to form the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences, but the promise of a more harmonious period was soon threatened by the arguments about funding that followed the Government's decision, on Lord Rothschild's recommendation, to transfer responsibility for applied research to Departments of State. An acceptable settlement was eventually reached and the institute did much useful work under the new arrangements. Perhaps its most important commission was a programme of research on the feasibility of ocean disposal of radioactive waste, a possibility recognised by Charnock 20 years earlier.

In 1978 Charnock accepted an invitation to return to Southampton. He stayed there as professor until his retirement in 1986 when he became emeritus professor. He had long believed that government research institutes should be closely associated with universities and during his first period as professor had negotiated a concordat between the National Institute of Oceanography and Southampton. A month before he died he was working on boundary roughness in the new laboratory there.

His return to Southampton freed him from much administrative drudgery and allowed him a long and highly productive period in teaching and research, and participating in the affairs of the Royal Society, which had elected him a Fellow in 1976. He was also active in national and international discussion of scientific affairs. A ten-year spell as a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution was, no doubt, an important factor in his appointment as CBE in 1992.

Charnock's virtuoso performances in committees were matched by a love of the performing arts, particularly music: his fondness for Beethoven's quartets seemed to be a natural complement to his own intellectual rigour and deep compassion. Out-of-doors he enjoyed walking, from the daily journey to work to the climb out of the Grand Canyon in his seventies and the ascent of Snowdon with his wife Mary on their golden wedding anniversary. He is survived by her and their son and two daughters.



DAWN STEEL

Dawn Steel, former studio chief and film producer, died of cancer on December 20 aged 51. She was born on August 19, 1946.

DAWN STEEL, dubbed "Steely Dawn", was the first woman to head a Hollywood studio. She never understood the words "no" or "it can't be done", and exhibited the qualities suggested by her last name, always considering toughness, resilience and a cold glint to be attributes in her business. They made her the most powerful woman in Hollywood, and she generously helped other women to follow her.

She oversaw the production of a string of hits before striking out on her own as an independent producer. Yet in her autobiography, *They Can Kill You But They Can't Eat You: Lessons from the Front* (1993), she admitted her bravado was partly a mask for insecurity.

Dawn Steel was born Dawn Spielberg in the Bronx in 1946 and grew up in Manhattan. Her mother Lillian was a businesswoman, her father Nat a zip-salesman and amateur weightlifter, who changed the family name to Steel to highlight his athletic prowess and (as he saw it) to remove

any potentially damaging ethnic taint.

Dawn Steel studied marketing at New York University, and worked as a sportswriter and marketing assistant before taking a job on the magazine *Penthouse* as director of its X-rated mail-order business. It was there that she first displayed her talent for marketing, when she suggested selling anarchy plants through the mail, highlighting their phallic appearance. The ploy was a gigantic hit, and Steel progressed through the company, working her way up to merchandising director before going her own way as a businesswoman.

In 1975, seeing how obsessed women had become with status, Steel began selling toilet paper linked with the Gucci logo. Immediately she was sued by the Italian company, and the New York tabloids delighted in covering the David and Goliath story they christened the "toilet paper caper". Steel lost the case, but the attendant publicity enhanced her reputation as someone who could capitalise on a trend, and after her first marriage ended in 1978 she moved to Hollywood to work at Paramount Pictures. One friend had predicted that if she could sell toilet tissue, she could surely sell movies.

Indeed she could. Joining the marketing department, she quickly established her reputation as a woman with an eye for a gimmick. It was Steel who suggested that the promotion of the movie *Star Trek* be supplemented by merchandising tie-ins, and the success of the strategy saw her move into production.

As a studio producer, she doggedly championed movies such as *Flashdance*, *Footloose*, *Top Gun* and *The Accused*, all of which focused on outsiders breaking through barriers and winning acceptance, just the way she saw herself as having done. It is one of the great American paradigms.

In 1985 the president of Paramount, Ned Tanen, appointed Steel president of production, but two years later he dismissed her, reportedly because of personality conflicts. Undaunted, and exhibiting the grit for which she had become famous, she took up the reins at Columbia Pictures, which had been in turmoil after a disastrous 18 months under the British director David Puttnam. As president of Columbia she was the highest ranking woman in Hollywood, and again she spawned a string of hits, including *When Harry Met Sally*, *Look Who's Talking* and *Postcards from the Edge*. Though she made her mark with highly commercial films, she said recently that the high point of her tenure at Columbia was overseeing the restoration and reissue of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Steel left Columbia in 1991 to become an independent producer, forming Atlas Pictures with her second husband, Charles Roven. Under that banner she produced the hit *Cool Runnings*, a comedy about a bobsled team from tropical Jamaica. Often described as the leader of the first generation of American "power women", Steel admitted to being a perfectionist, but she was quick to point out that her male colleagues were highly demanding and aggressive too. In an interview in 1993 she said being a movie executive was exhausting, and tended to "bring out the worst in people". But among women in Hollywood she was respected and admired. She believed that her success gave her a responsibility to open doors for other women, and she appointed many to jobs as executives, producers and directors.

Outside the movie business, Steel was a strong supporter of Democratic causes in California. She is survived by her husband and daughter.



PERSONAL COLUMN

FLIGHTS DIRECTORY

Continental Airlines to Chicago 11.40
Delta to New York 12.00
British Airways to London 12.30
Lufthansa to Frankfurt 13.00
Air France to Paris 13.30
Swire to Hong Kong 14.00
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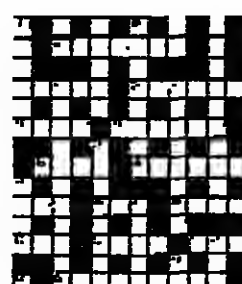
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BUSINESS EDITOR Patricia Wheatcroft

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 24 1997

BAT's stake in Zurich merger cut by £1bn

By CAROLINE MERRELL

BAT INDUSTRIES has been forced to reduce its stake in the proposed £25 billion merger between its financial services operations (BAFS) and Zurich, the Swiss insurance company, in an agreement that effectively cuts the value of the holding by £1 billion.

The revised proposals mean that Zurich shareholders will now own 57 per cent of the merged Zurich Financial Services Group (ZFS), while BAT Industries shareholders will hold 43 per cent. Under the original deal, the split was 55 per cent to Zurich and 45 per cent to BAT.

Analysts claim that Zurich has reneged on the deal because it was originally deemed to be "too good to be true" for BAT.

Despite the favourable reaction to the demerger when it was announced two months ago, BAT's share price has fallen nearly 12 per cent, while Zurich's has risen 4 per cent. BAT's decline has been attributed to continuing uncertainty about US smoking legislation — 60 per cent of BAT Industries' profits come from British American Tobacco.

Legislation could raise the price of cigarettes by up to a quarter in the US. That has put pressure on BAT Industries to demerger its financial services operations, including Allied Dunbar, Eagle Star and Threadneedle in the UK, and Farmers in the US.

Some analysts believe that Zurich's shareholders were unlikely to vote in favour of the original proposal, which, according to Tom Bennett, an analyst at Paribas, "offered a deal that will dilute earnings, dilute earnings growth and heavily dilute net worth per share".

The new agreement now looks almost certain to go through. If either party drops out, they will have to pay a



Martin Broughton, BAT chief executive, left, Rolf Huppi and Lord Cairns, right, launched the merger in October

penalty of about £180 million. Rolf Huppi, chief executive of BAT's insurance companies. These companies have tangible net worth of £2.4 billion on BAT's accounting base and £1.2 billion under Zurich's accounting base. He added: "Our consideration of the benefits of the BAFS acquisition leave us somewhat non-plussed as to why Zurich seems so keen to do the deal."

Under the new terms and conditions, British American Tobacco will now receive £500 million in securities from ZFS

rather than £500 million in cash as was originally envisaged. BAT Industries stated that this will not make any difference to its shareholders.

Lord Cairns, chairman of BAT Industries, said: "I am confident that BAT Industries shareholders will benefit from their investment in an enlarged world-class insurance business, as well as from the sharper focus to tobacco and financial services that will result from the merger."

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Goldman has \$4bn to spend on Japanese loan portfolios

FROM OLIVER AUGUST IN NEW YORK AND JANET BUSH

GOLDMAN SACHS, the US investment bank, wants to spend \$4 billion (£2.5 billion) on buying loans from troubled Japanese banks in the first big bargain-hunting effort since the Asian financial market crisis erupted.

Goldman has opened negotiations with several banks to buy asset-backed loans and is reported to have done a \$100 million deal with Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, buying loans that are primarily collateralised by land.

Japanese banks, hit hard by the Asian financial crisis, are among the country's largest landowners and many are now being forced to sell loans at bargain prices to bail out broken operations. Many of the loans are secured against Tokyo real estate, which has seen price falls of 70 per cent.

If Goldman manages to spend its entire planned war chest, its purchase would be equivalent to one eighth of all Japanese bad loans.

The US investment bank is already a big investor in land and real estate in America, owning, for example, a 50 per cent stake in New York's Rockefeller Center.

Goldman's purchase of Japanese loan portfolios could smooth its entry into Japan's financial markets, which are due to be opened up to foreign firms shortly. The US investment bank was recently subject of speculation about a possible takeover of Sumitomo Bank, the second largest bank.

Other American banks with experience of repackaging loans are expected to follow Goldman's lead. Wall Street earned millions from bundling and selling Latin American debt after the financial crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Goldman's move will also be

seen as a vote of confidence in Asian markets at current, extremely depressed levels.

Japanese markets were closed for a public holiday yesterday but South Korean markets continued to implode. Confidence was rocked by remarks in a newspaper interview by Kim Dae Jung, the President-elect. He said that he was flabbergasted by the extent of the crisis and even mentioned the possibility that South Korea was on the brink of bankruptcy.

Another blow came when Fitch IBCA, the international credit rating agency, gave South Korea its worst rating yet, judging its long-term foreign currency debt to be worth only a B minus, six notches below investment grade. Moody's Investor Services and Standard & Poor's cut South Korea's rating to "junk bond" status on Monday.

The stock market plunged by a record 7.5 per cent and the won slumped to yet another record low against the dollar. Interest rates on benchmark three-year corporate bonds with bank guarantees soared to a record 31.45 per cent, before recovering slightly to close at 31.1 per cent.

The heads of foreign banks operating in South Korea held an emergency meeting yesterday to decide whether to roll over loans to local financial institutions that are struggling with chronic dollar shortages. Lee Kyung Shick, Governor of the Bank of Korea, began a four-day visit to Japan where he is expected to ask top bankers for help in securing foreign loans for South Korean institutions.

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BUSINESS TODAY

STOCK MARKET INDICES	
FTSE 100	5048.8 (+31.6)
Yield	3.21%
FTSE All share	2271.80 (+11.59)
Nikkei	Closed
New York	
Dow Jones	7806.38 (+12.95)
S&P Composite	952.18 (+1.52)

US RATE	
Federal Funds	8.75% (8.75%)
Long Bond	100.75% (103.1%)
Yield	8.88% (8.88%)

LONDON MONEY	
3-month interbank	7.75% (7.75%)
Libor long gilt	121.7% (121.7%)

STERLING	
New York	1.6675 (1.6635)
London	
\$	1.6705 (1.6635)
DM	2.9225 (2.9210)
FF	9.9140 (9.9113)
Sfr	2.2919 (2.2909)
Yen	217.28 (216.58)
£ Index	104.9 (104.7)

US \$ & DOLLAR	
London	
DM	1.7748 (1.7815)
FF	5.5600 (5.5625)
Sfr	1.4338 (1.4382)
Yen	108.77 (108.15)
£ Index	105.4 (105.7)

Tokyo close Yen Closed

NORTH SEA OIL	
Brent 15-day (Mar)	\$17.85 (\$17.40)

* denotes midday trading price

Settlement

More than 30 Wall Street banks are expected to agree to pay \$1 billion (£590 million) to settle the biggest class action suit over securities fraud brought by investors. The case began in 1994 after a stock manipulation ring was exposed. Page 20

ICI deal

ICI Australia is to buy the explosives business of its former parent in Britain for \$570 million (£229 million). ICI Australia will become the world's largest supplier. Page 21

Investors sue Danka in Florida

DANKA Business Systems, the troubled photocopy group that has seen its stock market value plunge by more than £1 billion, is being sued by investors in the US for allegedly making false and misleading statements about its business prospects (see page 20).

A class action writ was filed yesterday in Florida, where many of Danka's senior managers are based, claiming that Danka had misled the market about how well it was integrating the £488 million purchase of the Eastman Kodak in July. This artificially inflated the share price of the group.

A warning about prospects from Danka last week brought a collapse in the group's share price from a high of 787p to 284p yesterday.

Mark Vaughan-Lee, Danka executive chairman, dismissed the action, saying: "Lawsuits are the national sport in America."

LCR late again on tunnel link

By MARK COURT

LONDON and Continental Railways, the company that was promised £1.4 billion of taxpayers' money to run a high-speed link between London and the Channel Tunnel, has fallen behind its construction timetable for a second time.

The company pledged in mid-November that it would appoint contractors for £500 million of tunnelling work by Christmas. It had missed an earlier deadline, in late summer, for awarding the first big construction package on the £3 billion project.

As the Christmas deadline slipped by, an LCR source admitted that it was unlikely that any of the four key contracts for tunnelling work under London would be signed before next year.

An LCR spokeswoman said: "Discussions are continuing with shortlisted contractors. It is important these discussions reach a satisfactory conclusion even if it takes slightly more time than originally planned. The negotiations will be completed early in the new year."

LCR, which plans to raise £5.4 billion in debt and equity through a flotation by the middle of next year, has attracted speculation about its financial viability. The company, whose shareholders include Virgin, National Express and SBC Warburg, the merchant bank, is holding talks with Railtrack and six other possible partners to join the project.

Construction sources say the delay has been caused by the client's efforts to ensure that contractors carry the bulk of any cost overruns. A contractor bidding for work on the project said: "The contract conditions have changed and the client wants to quantify some of the risks. We were asked to put in a price for carrying the risk of unforeseen ground conditions."

A joint venture of Amec and Balfour Beatty is expected to win the £300 million contract to build tunnels and a huge concrete station box at Stratford in East London.

Pound hits exports at last

BRITISH exports are finally showing signs of suffering from the strength of sterling (see page 20).

Britain reported a trade deficit with the rest of the world in October of £1.35 billion, the largest trade gap since October 1995, and compared with a deficit in September of £1.25 billion, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Figures for non-EU trade in November showed the gap widening to £1.06 billion from £888 million in October. This was the largest non-EU deficit since October 1995.

The culprit was a slowdown in export volumes, down 1.5 per cent over the past three months in trade with non-EU countries. At the same time, buoyant consumer demand at home is sucking in imports strongly.

ONS statisticians said the underlying trend is a widening of Britain's overall trade deficit. City economists blamed the strength of the pound and weaker exports to Asia as demand implodes.

Fading resilience, page 23

Lloyd's broker suspended

By JON ASHWORTH

A PROMINENT Lloyd's broker has been suspended for six months and ordered to pay £50,000 for orchestrating a secret profit on a deal linked to the Panama Canal.

Anthony Frost, former chairman of Citicorp Insurance Brokers, is the first person to be suspended by Lloyd's this year. Well-known in the market in the late 1980s, he has admitted five charges of misconduct linked to conducting insurance business in a discreditable manner.

Mr Frost made no direct personal gain from his dealings. His suspension aside, he has been fined £10,000 and ordered to pay Lloyd's costs of £40,000. He has also been censured. The misconduct arose in respect of a contract that Citicorp entered into with the Panama Canal Commission (PCC) in April 1990, and was subsequently renewed.

Citicorp Insurance Brokers changed its name to Nelson Hurst Insurance Brokers after a management buyout in 1991.

Discrepancies between slips, cover notes and debit notes on the PCC contract resulted in Nelson Hurst taking a secret profit of £150,000 (£90,361) over a five-year period. The money was returned to the PCC with interest — a total of \$181,664 (£109,436) — in April 1996, soon after the matter came to light.

Mr Frost was responsible for the PCC contract throughout the relevant period. He had left the company by the time that the discrepancies came to light.

The action against him marks a continuation of the tough disciplinary line taken by Lloyd's. Details of disciplinary actions, previously circulated internally, have been made public since September 1996. New by-laws gave Lloyd's the power to impose fixed penalty fines, and circulate the details to a wider audience.

Lloyd's recently banned three brokers in the space of less than three weeks after findings of misconduct.

Knickerbox falls victim to poor Christmas sales

By FRASER NELSON

KNICKERBOX, the last refuge for many men who cannot think of anything else to buy their partners, has collapsed into insolvency after claiming it is the first victim of the slowdown in high street spending.

The underwear chain, which, with Tie Rack and Sock Shop, led the 1980s niche retailing boom, said it has been sunk by lack of Christmas shoppers and is now nursing empty

tills and a cashflow crisis. It has been passed into the hands of Buchler Phillips, the insolvency practitioner, which plans to keep its 44 stores running throughout the new year, while keeping creditors at bay.

Simon Freakley, managing partner at Buchler Phillips, said: "Fundamentally, we have a business with a strong brand in a well-established niche that has excellent potential in its marketplace. Its problems are exclusively connected to the slump in

Christmas sales — had things been better, they would have survived."

He said he is confident of finding a buyer within the next six weeks. The administrator has not yet worked out how much debt Knickerbox has, but is confident it is significantly less than the £4.6 million of net liabilities it was left with after last Christmas.

Knickerbox, founded 11 years ago by Jamie Godber and Stephen Schaffer, a husband and wife team who used to work at Marks &

Spencer, was one of the few retailers to prosper in the 1991 recession — but it plunged into the red when the recovery set in.

Gieves, the Savile Row tailor, paid £660,000 for a 49.5 per cent stake in a rescue package. However, Knickerbox has not made a penny of profit for the past five years — with a pre-tax loss of £3.65 million last year.

La Senza, Knickerbox's high street rival, is not doing much better. After a series of profits warnings since its

stock market debut 14 months ago, its capitalisation has plunged 87 per cent. It is now priced at 22p a share — a market value of £7.37 million.

Analysts expressed surprise that Knickerbox's financial recovery could have been scuppered in three weeks of quiet trading. Verdict, the retail research house, said yesterday that it has seen no signs of a spending slowdown. It expects high street sales to jump 9 per cent this December, to £20.3 billion.

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Lloyds TSB sells Factors to Bank of New York

By RICHARD MILES
BANKING CORRESPONDENT

LLOYDS TSB yesterday confirmed the sale of International Factors, the biggest of its three factoring subsidiaries, to the Bank of New York for an undisclosed sum.

The British bank said it would make a pre-tax profit of £160 million on the disposal of International Factors, which at the end of November had total assets of £817 million. The company, which is based in Brighton and employs 500, offers factoring and invoice discounting services to UK and European small and medium-sized companies. It has net assets of £5 million.

Lloyds TSB Group decided to sell the subsidiary, after a strategic review, so that it might concentrate resources on its two other factoring businesses. Peter Ellwood, chief executive of Lloyds TSB, said: "The invoice discounting and factoring markets remain important to Lloyds TSB and we will continue to develop the business of both Alex Lawrie and TSB Commercial Finance."

Bank of New York said the acquisition of International Factors, coupled with its takeover of two UCB invoice discounting businesses in July, would provide a springboard for the bank's European expansion plans.

Joe Grimaldi, chairman and president of

BNY Financial Corporation, said the combined businesses amounted to a 20 per cent share of the UK factoring and invoice discounting market, probably making the American bank the largest single player in the country.

Although Mr Grimaldi declined to guarantee the security of the 500 jobs at International Factors and the 70 positions at UCB, he said large-scale redundancies were highly unlikely. "In this industry, it is very difficult to find good people. Our intention isn't to buy and construct, but to buy and expand," he said.

Historically, the high-street banks have dominated the UK factoring industry. But the £40 billion market has in recent years become

highly attractive to foreign entrants, particularly American banks, because of its annual growth rate of 20 per cent. According to the Factors and Discounters Association, close to 21,000 companies now use the services of a factoring or invoice discounting firm.

Nick Blackwell, commercial director of Griffin, Midland Bank's factoring subsidiary, said the job of a good factor was to look at the total assets of a business and then say how it could make better use of them. "Often investors in a small business do not have any appetite for equity. We provide an alternative," he said.

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Wall Street banks close to settling \$1bn claim

FROM OLIVER AUGUST IN NEW YORK

THIRTY ONE Wall Street banks are expected to agree to pay \$1 billion (£590 million) to settle the biggest ever class-action suit over securities fraud brought by investors.

Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, Credit Suisse First Boston and Salomon Smith Barney are among the banks involved in the case that began in 1994 after a stock manipulation ring was exposed.

Traders on the Nasdaq Exchange in New York, Ameri-

ca's second largest exchange, are charged with harassing and refusing to trade with investors who offered investors better stock prices.

The traders are also said to have colluded to fix specific share prices. They delayed reporting big trades where it benefited their positions and exchanged company news before public announcements, calling themselves "friendly competitors".

The banks refused to comment on either the case or the ongoing settlement talks, the terms of which have already drawn criticism for being too low. The suit alleges that millions of investors lost money in the early 1990s on Nasdaq.

The plaintiffs' lawyers have been keen to achieve a settlement of at least \$1 billion to establish a high-water mark for civil antitrust settlements. Robert Skirnick, one of the lawyers, said: "The evidence is strong to support the conclusion that never before in the history of stock trading have so few people taken so much money from so many."

Separately from the suit against the banks and their traders, the National Association of Securities Dealers, which runs the Nasdaq market, was fined \$100 million and forced to implement tighter supervision practices.

Talks continued yesterday and a settlement could be reached by the end of the week. After a long period of inactivity, the negotiations accelerated recently, prompted by record profits of \$12 billion on Wall Street for the current year.

The banks are now eager to tie up an agreement before the end of the year so that they might write the payment off against taxes.

The settlement would need the approval of a judge in New York and investors would have the opportunity to opt out of the settlement to pursue separate claims.

UK firm hopes for new Prozac approval

By PAUL DURMAN

ELI LILLY, the US pharmaceutical group that makes Prozac, has filed for regulatory approval of an improved version of the anti-depressant developed by SkyePharma, the British drug minor headed by Ian Gowrie-Smith.

The prospect of sharing in the royalties from Prozac, which has annual sales of \$2.4 billion (£1.4 billion), will be a significant boost to SkyePharma's credibility, which was badly damaged by a poorly timed fund raising in September.

Although Prozac has become a cultural icon in the US, it causes some users to feel sick or to suffer anxiety. Jago, SkyePharma's drug delivery arm, is believed to have developed a version that reduces or eliminates these side effects. Peter Laing, a Société Générale analyst, has suggested Jago may have combined Prozac with another drug in a single pill, citing Lilly-sponsored research published in *The Lancet*.

Prozac's patent protection is due to expire in four years. An improved version would allow Lilly to secure an extended period of freedom from competition. Even with the onset of cut-price competition for the original version, Mr Laing believes the improved drug should be able to achieve sales of more than \$1 billion a year. With a royalty of about 3 per cent, this would be worth \$30 million a year to SkyePharma, which lost £102 million in its most recent half year.

Lilly is believed to have filed its application with the US Food and Drug Administration this month, although the papers will not become public for several weeks.



Alan Dalby, left, chairman, and Vernon Sankey, chief executive of Reckitt & Colman, which is expanding in the US

Reckitt buys four US brands

By DOMINIC WALSH

RECKITT & COLMAN, the consumer goods conglomerate, is to bolster its position in North America through the acquisition of four household brands from SC Johnson & Co for \$160 million (£96 million).

Spray 'n' Wash, Glass Plus, Vivid and Yes were inherited by Johnson as part of its recently agreed acquisition of Dow Chemical Company's consumer products business.

They are expected to produce a 1997 profit of \$16.2 million from sales of \$131 million. The acquisition involves only the brands, with manufacturing due to be transferred to Reckitt at a later stage.

Reckitt, whose brands include Harpic, Dettol and Lemsip, said the deal was in line with its stated strategy of using acquisitions "to fill gaps in core categories or geographic areas, and to focus on

number one and number two household brands".

Spray 'n' Wash, a fabric care brand, and Glass Plus, a glass cleaner, are both number two in North America, while the Vivid colour-safe bleach brand is number three. Together with Yes, a laundry detergent, they give Reckitt a strong position in the North American fabric care market.

The deal is subject to US regulatory approval, but as-

suming it goes through in January, North America will account for 36 per cent of Reckitt & Colman's sales, compared with Europe's 31 per cent.

In Australia, Reckitt has sold the rights to the Holbrook's and Newman's Worcestershire sauces for A\$14 million (£5.5 million) to Goodman Fielder food group.

Tempos, page 22

De Broe breaches panel code

By RICHARD MILES

WILLIAMS DE BROE, the corporate stockbroker, has been wrapped over the knuckles by the Takeover Panel for its failure to disclose an acquisition offer to a client whose share price subsequently rose by more than 20 per cent.

Morris Ashby, an engineering company, announced on December 1 that it was in talks that might lead to an offer for

the company. Two days later, Automotive Components Investments (ACI) offered 400p per share, valuing the company at £49 million.

However, the Takeover Panel has discovered that Morris Ashby had begun discussions with ACI's financial backer, Windward Capital Partners, in August. During the intervening period, Ashby

statements about the company.

In this case, the panel accepted that Williams de Broe's failure to raise the matter was not as a result of a deliberate intent to prevent the Stock Exchange from making its own announcement. "Nevertheless, it had that effect and was therefore a breach of an essential code requirement," it said in a statement.

Staffs at four banks to take strike action

By RICHARD MILES, BANKING CORRESPONDENT

FOUR high street banks face widespread disruption today as thousands of staff threaten to mount a one-day strike in separate disputes over pay and working hours.

The Banking Insurance and Finance Union (Bifu) says its members will stage a walkout at Midland and Royal Bank of Scotland branches in protest at being made to work this afternoon, Christmas Eve, traditionally a holiday for banking staff. At the same time, Bifu members working for Yorkshire and Clydesdale

banks will take action over pay. They are complaining that the banks are offering below-inflation salary increases at a time when both have posted record profits.

Bifu claims that more than 20,000 staff could take part in the stoppage. However, all four banks expect the strike to have a minimal impact. Yorkshire Bank said: "The strike has a low level of support. Up to 90 per cent of our branches will be unaffected and we are pretty confident we can handle the rest."

JCI appoints Bray as chief executive

JCI, the South African mining group that is in merger talks with Lonrho, has appointed Vaughan Bray as chief executive, after the decision last week by Mzi Khumalo, JCI's chairman, to relinquish his role as JCI's chief executive. Mr Bray is chief executive of Johnnies Industrial Corporation, which is chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa, who lost out to Mr Khumalo in the fight to gain control of JCI last year. Mr Khumalo, who is said to be close to Lonrho, has fallen out with board members over the proposed purchase of 20 per cent in Southern Mining.

Finsbury proposes merger with Wren

By JON ASHWORTH

IN the latest in a wave of restructuring to sweep the Lloyd's insurance market, Finsbury Underwriting Investment Trust is seeking to merge with Wren Holdings.

Under the proposed deal, Finsbury will acquire the 85 per cent of the shares it does not already own in Wren, which manages syndicates with a total capacity of £294 million. The merged group, yet to be named, will have a market value of about £80 million. Wren's members' agency advises a total of £392

million capacity, including Finsbury's £70 million, which it has advised since 1993.

Shareholders vote on the merger in the new year. The deal has the support of Benfield and Ren Investment Trust, which owns 25 per cent of Wren, and 14.5 per cent of Finsbury. It is proposed that Robin Baillie of Finsbury will be chairman of the combined company and Andrew Shone of Wren is expected to be named chief executive.

Shares in Finsbury rose 9.5p to 150p.

BUSINESS ROUNDUP

First Call in £7.4m takeover by LMH

FIRST CALL GROUP, the ticket agency, has agreed a £7.4 million takeover bid by Loyalty Management Holdings (LMH), which created the Air Miles scheme with British Airways. LMH is to set up a loyalty points programme offering discounted tickets for leisure events using First Call software and contacts. It has deals with an unnamed major retailer and a bank to provide the rewards programme in March. The scheme is expected to create 250 new jobs. Keith Mills, chairman of the new company, said: "The vision for this new business is to build an operation capable of delivering travel, leisure, entertainment and sports products and services to consumers, using sophisticated reservations and booking technology." First Call is the UK's largest live entertainment ticketing agency. It also provides ticket sales services to the Wembley complex, although this contract is being terminated next February. Its turnover last year was £44.9 million with a pre-tax profit of £3.4 million. LMH is offering 10.25p per each First Call share. Yesterday the shares rose 34p to 10p, against this year's high of 11p.

US oil and gas merger

OCEAN ENERGY and United Meridian, two American companies, are to merge, creating one of the largest independent oil and gas companies in the world, with a market capitalisation of \$3.1 billion (£1.9 billion) and assets of \$1.2 billion. Ocean Energy, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, said its holdings in the Gulf of Mexico and the southern United States would be combined with United Meridian's properties in West Africa. The merged company will also have assets in Asia. The combined companies will produce about 58,000 barrels of oil and 350 million cubic feet of gas a day.

BT avoids Ofcom action

OFTEL, the telecommunications regulatory body, has decided not to move against BT over cross subsidies to its Chargecard service. Ofcom, which had been concerned that subsidies might keep out competition, said that BT had changed its Chargecard tariff and put in place a plan to end subsidies. Don Cruickshank, Director-General of Telecommunications, said: "I am pleased that BT has now taken the steps needed to enable competition to develop in this market." BT yesterday welcomed Ofcom's decision not to take formal enforcement action.

Vymura-Benetton deal

VYMURA, the wallcoverings manufacturer, has signed a licensing agreement with Benetton to produce a range of wallcoverings for the UK market. The agreement is worth up to £10 million in sales over a five-year period. Vymura already has licensing agreements with Walt Disney, Warner Brothers and Mattel. This latest agreement comes after the success of the Ports of Call wallcoverings, designed for Vymura by Jeff Banks, and the Royal Doulton designs, launched last year, the company said. Vymura shares rose to 117p from a 12-month low of 115p yesterday.

Reflec systems review

SHARES in Reflec dived from 31p to 12p after the AIM-listed company said it had appointed Arthur Andersen to review the finances and management systems. The findings will be communicated to the board in mid-January. The review is to determine whether Reflec needs additional finance to best exploit its products and to complete capital investments. Reflec said it has a large number of new products with "exciting" prospects that are not ready for launch yet. It lost £454,000 in the year to February on sales of £537,000.

Acatos holds dividend

ACATOS & HUTCHESON, the edible oils and fats manufacturing group, suffered a fall in pre-tax profits to £5.8 million from £7.7 million in the year to September 28. Operating profits fell 8.2 per cent to £5.2 million, reflecting delays in the commissioning of upgraded refining capacity. The company said the delay would continue to affect its performance in the first half. Earnings fell to 9.5p a share from 14.6p. The final dividend is held at 6.5p a share, making a total of 10.5p, compared with 10p.

Wilshaw raises £22.5m

WILSHAW is raising £22.5 million through the sale of its distribution division to Traciv, a newly formed company, it was announced yesterday. In the year to March 31, the division being sold earned an operating profit of £3.5 million on sales of £26.4 million. The division's net assets were £11.8 million at the end of the year. Wilshaw will use £6 million to repay its bank borrowings, with the remainder earmarked for acquisitions to expand the powder metals division. Wilshaw shares rose 2p to 39p yesterday.

Firth Rixson expands

FIRTH RIXSON, the specialist engineer, has bought Barworth Flockton and Moss & Gamble Brothers from Barworth Holdings for £12 million. The amount was paid in cash and included £2 million for the shares and £10 million for repayment of inter-company and bank debts. Barworth Flockton manufactures tool and special steels, while Moss & Gamble is an open die forger. Firth Rixson said: "Both companies will fit well within the FR group enabling a wider range of products to be offered to our customers and other synergies to be achieved."

Airports lift revenue

EUROPEAN airports lifted revenues 8.1 per cent to about £8.67 billion in 1996, according to Airports Council International, an industry body. ACI also said the airports invested £2.4 billion in improving facilities and increasing capacity, a rise of 1.6 per cent over the previous year. Two Italian airports, Rome Fiumicino and Milan Linate, showed the strongest revenue growth figures in 1996, up 21.1 per cent and 20.8 per cent respectively. Figures for 1997 are not yet available.

Sears' company doctor close to completing BSC sale

By JASON NISSE



David James has cut £40 million of losses by selling three businesses in three weeks

DAVID JAMES, the company doctor brought in by Sears to sort out its British Shoe Corporation (BSC) subsidiary, said yesterday he was close to completing the sale of the operation after receiving £6 million for its Shoe City business.

Bretano, the Belgian shoe retailer, is buying the Shoe City name and 44 of its out-of-town stores. Sears will retain one store and close another 39. Around 650 people will lose their jobs, though Mr James said the structure of the deal meant that as many as 1,250 jobs would be saved.

Mr James has now sold three BSC businesses in three weeks - cutting £40 million from the annual losses of the troubled operation that he had hoped to sell in one lot.

It is now expected that the Cable & Co chain of 24 upmarket shoe shops will be

sold in January for around £10 million. This is the only profitable business within BSC.

"A cynic might say that Cable has benefited because it has had the fewest number of bright ideas applied to it," said Mr James.

The company doctor is currently working on a deal to save a large part of BSC's distribution centre at Braunstone, near Leicester, by transferring part of the distribution work for the rest of the Sears group to the centre. This move may save as many as 180 jobs.

When Mr James, whose previous tasks have included the rescues of Danair and Eagle Trust, took over at BSC, Sears provided £150 million to cover the closure of its shoe operations, which once sold a quarter of all shoes in the UK. Mr James

said that the costs would be pretty much in line with this amount.

The Shoe City deal had to be completed in a matter of days after a sudden sharp movement in Bretano's share price brought pressure for a statement on the Brussels stock exchange. Bretano is one of Europe's most successful out-of-town shoe retailers.

Earlier this month Mr James completed the sale of the Dolcis chain to a group made up of Alencon, the fashion retailer, and Electra Fleming, the venture capitalist. Last week he sold Shoe Express to a team led by Philip Green, the former chief executive of Amber Day, the fashion and discount retailer now renamed WEW Group.

Sears shares rose 1p to 50p on the news.

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TOURIST RATES

	Bank	Bank
	Buy	Sell
Australia \$	2.28	2.40
Austria Sch	27.89	27.14
Belgium Fr	64.14	66.18
Canada C\$	1.31	1.33
Cyprus Cyp£	0.511	0.525
Denmark Kr	11.85	10.98
Finland Mk	8.81	8.76
France Fr	10.36	10.28
Germany Dm	3.12	2.88
Greece Dr	482	475
Hong Kong \$	13.74	12.52
Ireland P	1.21	1.11
Israel Sh	6.28	5.65
Italy Lira	2075	2032
Japan Yen	201.33	213.80
Malta	0.683	0.659
Netherlands Gld	5.528	5.272
New Zealand \$	3.00	2.78
Norway Kr	12.73	11.70
Portugal Esc	314.33	292.50
Spain Ptas	166.38	157.50
Sweden Kr	8.50	7.95
Switzerland Fr	201.58	242.50
Turkey Lira	13.76	12.05
USA \$	2.24	2.35
USA \$	1.773	1.850

PLC. Different rates apply to transfers to and from the UK. Rates as at close of trading yesterday.

Ellwood's international factor



COMMENTARY
by our City Editor

When Lloyds TSB was looking at its portfolio of factoring companies — and deciding that maybe owning three was a little excessive — it was obvious which one was to go. Sir Brian Pitman has spent the past decade paring back the Lloyds worldwide network and concentrating on dominating the British high street. A company called International Factors was clearly not going to fit in with Sir Brian's vision. Booking a £160 million profit on a business that Alex Lawrie, the Lloyds main factoring operation, will now attack with gusto, sounds like sensible business practice.

But this sale could also indicate a sea change in strategy for the bank. Peter Ellwood, the old Barclaycard boss, became chief executive earlier this year, as Sir Brian moved to chairman. Not surprisingly, Ellwood has taken some time to start stamping his personality on the bank that Sir Brian built. Like his chairman, Ellwood is keen to dominate the high street, developing a segmented brand approach that uses the Lloyds, TSB, Cheltenham & Gloucester and Lloyds Abbey Life brands to attack the customer from all angles.

But whereas Sir Brian's concept of shrinking abroad and getting out of investment banking enabled Lloyds to avoid the problems that plagued other high street banks, it has also left the group too exposed to an overbanked British high street

where growth is slowing. Ellwood realises this and must be wondering where the growth is going to come from at Lloyds. The answer may be to reverse Sir Brian's incredible shrinking bank strategy. Lloyds has already signalled that it is keen on expanding further in Latin America, in general, and Brazil, in particular. But this is less of an about turn than one might think, as Lloyds never really severed the connections it built up in Brazil through the Bank of London and South America. Ellwood may be prepared to take Lloyds into uncharted waters.

The US is probably out of the question. British banks — with the exception of Royal Bank of Scotland — have been about as well received in that market as General Cornwallis in 1776. Europe is tempting — the competition is tough. It would not be beyond those clever clogs on Lombard Street to make a contra-cyclical move.

Like Goldman Sachs, Ellwood might consider that the blood-bath in the Far East has gone quite far enough. Goldman is considering mopping up property loans by Japanese banks — buying them at a fraction of their face value. Lloyds might take the

same attitude to banks. But if Ellwood goes shopping he does not have to look far. Standard Chartered shares have fallen by more than a third since the Far East turmoil started. It is now valued at a mere £6.5 billion. If Goldman Sachs is right and Japan has bottomed, this should stabilise the region. Buying Standard Chartered at these levels could be a strategic move by Ellwood of which Sir Brian Pitman would be proud.

Scrooge earns wrath of professions

The Treasury's pre-Christmas role as Scrooge has culminated in another future assault on the middle classes. Ministers probably imagine that partners in big accountancy and law firms, who are being targeted, drive cars that cost more than the lifetime savings limit in an ISA. In reality, as the Associ-

ation of Chartered Certified Accountants quickly claimed "it could lead thousands of firms into bankruptcy".

Professional firms, so persuasive in such matters, convinced the Inland Revenue years ago that they should be taxed on cash received rather than monies they are owed or estimated profits on work in progress. As long as customers eventually pay, partners are taxed, but much later. Now this concession is to be withdrawn, producing a one-off windfall to the Treasury that could be nearly £200 million. In future, tax will have to be paid on earnings defined by the use of accounting standards.

Public sympathy for Big Six accountants, top commercial law firms and City surveyors may be limited. But most of these do not pay tax on a crude cash basis. Many account tax on bills sent out and some on a modified accounting basis. And you will not be shocked to hear that tax

partners are already working productively yesterday on loopholes and palliative schemes.

The damage will be done at the other end of the professional ladder. Smaller professional firms often have much smaller profit margins and find it hard to collect bills. So the one-off hit could be several times annual profits tax, straining already strained finances.

Solicitors and barristers will not react kindly to the Lord Chancellor's plan to replace legal aid with contingency fees, if they are taxed on all the work they do in advance. Accountants working in corporate finance also work on a contingency basis, in which all or most of their fees depend on success in a deal.

The measure could create havoc well beyond professionals. Unless micro business is excluded, many thousands of unincorporated firms will be forced to have more complex and expensive accounting systems, run by

outside accountants, to work out their tax in the way the Revenue now wants to make compulsory. You can, at least, rely on the professional sections of the middle classes not to take a windfall tax lying down. You can also predict who will ultimately pay. Expect to be billed for it has been printed off the word processor.

Sears needs to buck the trend

Is the tide turning at that great destroyer of shareholder value — Sears? After two years of the sort of performance which would shame anyone but Laura Ashley, the latest disposal, that of Shoe City, might indicate that Sears is close to bottoming out. This should coincide with the last of the British Shoe Corporation, the albatross around Sears' neck.

But it may have more to do with the way BSC was dismantled — professionally and by someone who knew what he was doing. David James has spent £150 million to eliminate £40 million of losses — a price earnings ratio of 3.75 if you want to look at it that way. In the

meantime Sears' shares have lost nearly half their value.

Like Stalin's scorched earth policy during the Second World War, the Sears retreat from Leicester has been painful but successful. However, a great deal depends on how Sears builds from its new narrow base of Selfridges and a couple of fashion chains. The most important factor will be the growth of Selfridges, for which a large expansion of the Oxford Street store and a couple of out-of-town stores is planned.

The nearest equivalent of Selfridges, Harvey Nichols, has hardly been sparkling recently. The next nearest performer, House of Fraser, has been downright dreadful, though it might be on a recovery path. Sears needs to show it can buck the trend. But on past performance this might manifest itself as "anything you can do, I can do worse".

Gift wrapped

LOOKING for a last-minute gift for your husband or wife? Try some bombed-out shares in your own company. Directors of Ionica, the radio-based phone service whose shares plunged from a 390p launch to a 58p low on software problems, bought 90,000 at 84p, as part of a programme in which employees vacuumed up 250,000. Hours later, they show a 10 per cent profit. But remember, shares are not just for Christmas.



Game on: Roy Howell, who will remain as managing director of Maygay, left, and Rupert Lyle, of 3i, yesterday

European Leisure sells gaming arm

By Dominic Walsh

EUROPEAN LEISURE, the sports bars and discotheques group, is to sell its Maygay amusement machines business for £16.5 million to a group of institutional investors led by 3i, the venture capital group, and existing management.

Maygay, the UK's second largest manufacturer of gaming machines, achieved record results in the year to June 30, raising operating profits 70 per cent to £4.1 million, on turnover of £29 million, although this year's results are not expected to be as good.

Patrick Hooper, finance director of European Leisure, said it was this volatility that had persuaded the group to sell Maygay. He added: "In this business, you're only as good as the last machine you've produced. If you pro-

duce a good machine which the big brewers want, you have a period of success, but if you don't then things aren't so good." He said Maygay's market share had fluctuated between 16 and 26 per cent from one year to the next.

Mr Hooper said the proceeds from the sale, which is conditional on shareholder approval, would be invested in expanding the group's sports bars and discotheques businesses, where growth was more consistent. European Leisure will book a profit of about £10 million on the deal.

The institutional investors have put up total funding of £20.5 million, with 3i's Birmingham office providing about £10 million. Roy Howell, whose father founded the business in 1968, will continue as managing director of Maygay.

Jacques Vert set to resume dealing

By Dominic Walsh

SHARE-DEALING in Jacques Vert, the troubled women's wear retailer, looks set to be reactivated within weeks after yesterday's announcement of a wide-ranging reorganisation and the extension of its banking facilities.

The group, whose shares were suspended at 21p last month in the wake of its fifth profit warning in two years, is to close the Jacques Vert wholesale business in a bid to cut costs and streamline operations. It is also selling its Grace Collection, a range aimed at a younger market, for £1.6 million to a management buy-in team.

Bill Reid, chairman, said the group had withdrawn from all but eight of its 32 House of Fraser outlets, but had agreed 10 new concessions within other retailers and further sites were under discussion.

His comments came as he unveiled losses before exceptional items, interest and tax more than doubled to £6.8 million in the 53 weeks ended May 3. Exceptional costs connected with the restructuring took pre-tax losses to £9.5 million compared to a loss last time of £5 million.

Earlier in the year its manufacturing plant in Washington, Tyne & Wear, was closed. The shares were suspended after it became apparent the company was likely to breach its banking facility limit. Midland Bank has increased its overdraft facility from £7.5 million to £8 million, while Littlewoods, which acquired a 29.9 per cent stake in Jacques Vert in January, has agreed a short-term loan of £500,000 until the end of April.

Tempus, page 22

ICI Australia pays £229m to top explosives league

By George Sivel

ICI Australia is to buy the explosives business of its former parent in Britain for £229 million (£229 million). The deal will make ICI Australia the world's largest supplier of explosives, with a market share of 20 per cent.

ICI has now made £1.5 billion of disposals since the £4.7 billion purchase of Unilever's special chemicals business last summer. The latest deal, described by ICI Australia as a "competitive auction process", includes explosives operations in Canada, Latin America and Europe as well as the American distribution business.

In Britain, ICI said the

disposal of its explosives business would give rise to a pre-tax exceptional gain of £85 million. ICI's European explosives operations are based in Wigan, Greater Manchester, and employ 2,700 in Europe.

ICI expects the deal to help earnings and intends to use the proceeds to reduce group borrowings. The explosives arm had estimated sales of US\$500 million (£299 million) this year and trading profit of £20 million (£3 million), on net assets of \$295 million.

ICI Australia is to be renamed Orica in February after becoming an independent company this year when ICI sold its majority 62.4 per

cent stake. ICI Australia expects big cost savings. Philip Weickhardt, managing director, said the savings would run to tens of millions of Australian dollars.

He expected the newly expanded explosives business to generate double-digit profit returns before interest and tax. The business generated a return of 19 per cent in the year to September 30, though operations in Canada, Latin America and Europe, and the distribution business in the United States, generate a much lower return.

The newly-acquired operation is less exposed to gold mining than ICI Australia's

existing domestic business is. The company is concerned about the impact of a sharply lower gold price on mining and exploration activity, Mr Weickhardt said. The acquired operations mainly supply coal mines.

Cost savings will be generated from economies of scale and synergies between operations.

Peter Clinch, the former ICI Australia executive who has been managing the global explosives business of ICI, will head the expanded ICI Australia explosives business. The acquisition is due to be completed early next year. ICI shares rose 3p to 923p.

Accountants fear tax will push small firms into bankruptcy

By Jon Ashworth

PLANS by the Government to impose a "windfall tax" on professional partnerships could push thousands of smaller firms into bankruptcy, it was claimed yesterday. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) said withdrawing the "cash basis" of financial reporting was "unfair and unjust" and constituted an assault on all unincorporated businesses.

Coopers & Lybrand esti-

mates that a one-off "catching-up charge" imposed on partnerships could net up to £200 million for the Treasury. The Government insists the move is about "levelling the playing field" and removing unfair tax advantages.

ACCA said the proposed changes ran contrary to everything that has been said about lightening the burden on small businesses. Mavis Sargent, chairman of ACCA's

taxation committee, said many businesses could face bankruptcy. Some firms would experience a double hit, because not only would the earnings basis be changed, but work in progress would no longer be eligible for treatment on a cash basis.

Sue Chisman, a partner in the professional business group at PFMG, said small firms would be particularly hard hit.

Henlys in £21m bus takeover

By Our City Staff

HENLYS, the UK bus and coach builder, and Volvo, the Swedish auto manufacturer, are expanding their joint operations in North America with a £21 million takeover.

Prevost, their jointly-owned Canadian coach builder, is buying Nova Bus Corporation, the biggest manufacturer of city buses in Canada and the US. Based in Montreal, Nova Bus has a 30 per cent share of its market, with factories in Montreal, New Mexico and New York State employing 1,700 people.

In 1996 it sold 1,380 buses. It made a pre-tax loss of £2.1 million on sales of £193 million in 1996, but a change in product at Montreal led to a pre-tax profit of £3.9 million on sales of £147.7 million in the 10 months to October 31.

Prevost was bought by Volvo and Henlys in 1995. Earlier this year Henlys, which has UK factories in Scarborough, where it makes Plaxton coaches, and Wigan, where its Northern Counties subsidiary makes buses, sold its motor dealerships.

Ionica staff buy 'low shares'

By Raymond Snoddy, Media Editor

DIRECTORS and staff of Ionica, the beleaguered telecommunications group, have been buying up shares in the company because they believe the current price is too low. The share price of Ionica, which specialises in telecommunications for the residential market using radio, reached a 42p high after its flotation this year. The company lost 40 per cent of its

share value in November after a warning that it was suffering from software delays and resulting capacity problems. The shares have dipped as low as 57p but have since been climbing.

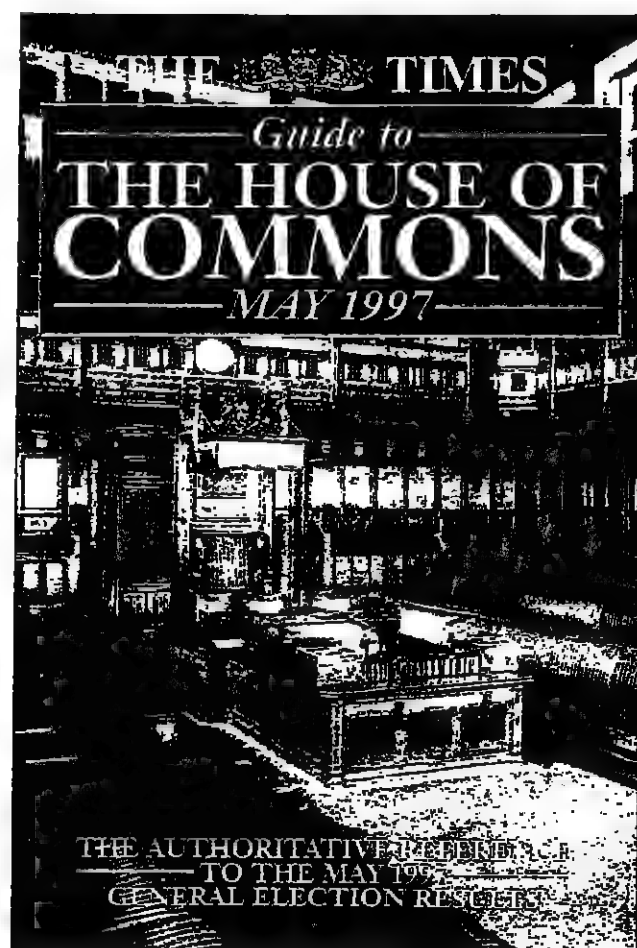
Michael Biden, the former senior executive at BT who became Ionica's chief operating officer last month, bought — together with his wife — a total of 68,257 shares in Ionica

at 84p. John Edwards, Ionica's finance director, has bought 22,500 shares, also at 84p, taking his stake to 34,807 shares. Individual employees have also bought shares, the total coming to over 250,000.

Colin Caldwell, company secretary, said yesterday: "The employees think the market has gone completely mad and they are filling their boots." The shares rose 11p to 98p.

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The fire sale of Asia has begun. Goldman Sachs is today reported to be preparing to spend \$4 billion (\$2.4 billion) on buying up bundles of asset-backed loans from stricken Japanese banks, the equivalent of one eighth of all Japan's had loans. Other American investment banks, who learnt the art of buying and repackaging bad loans during the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, will surely follow. These forays are the very early signs of an American takeover of Asia's financial and banking sectors, aided and abetted by the International Monetary Fund.

It is too easy to accuse the IMF of incompetence in its handling of the Asian crisis. Its critics charge that the IMF's imposition of a monetary squeeze on Asian economies is inappropriate for what is essentially a crisis of bad debt. High interest rates virtually ensure that a large proportion of Asia's financial institutions will

How West cages Asian tigers in IMF trap

go to the wall, they will. Surely the IMF must see that identical austerity packages imposed on the fiscally profligate in the developing world are not appropriate for Asia? These charges are perfectly valid but miss the point. Even the IMF could not get its diagnosis and treatment this badly wrong by mistake. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that its "bail-out" of Asia amounts to a deliberate policy of laying the region open to takeover by foreign interests.

The IMF knows very well that the American banking system was saved and nursed back to health after the 1987 stock market crash because the US Federal Reserve pumped masses of liquidity into the economy and kept interest rates low for a long time. It is no mistake that the very opposite is

being imposed on Asia. At the same time as the IMF is ensuring a brutal shake-out of Asian financial institutions, it is demanding that Asian governments open their financial markets to foreign investment at their point of maximum vulnerability and when assets are cheapest.

Let anyone dismiss this as a silly conspiracy theory, just remember the speech that Mickey Kantor, former US Commerce Secretary, made to the Confederation of British Industry this month. He told his audience that the troubles of the "tiger" economies should be seized as a golden opportunity for the West to reassert its commercial interests. When countries seek help from the IMF, he said, America and Europe should use the IMF as a



Janet Bush
battering them to gain advantage. The pact that Asian governments have made with the IMF is positively Faustian. They get billions of dollars in the short-term but lose control of their destinies. The "tigers" will emerge from the current crisis decimated and owned by the West. The IMF may genuinely believe

that West is best and that Japan and South Korea will end up with a sound financial system much more quickly if their banks are run by Goldman Sachs or Citicorp. But there is still something faintly obscene in the way that western commercial interests always appear to profit from other's misfortunes (and avoid paying for their own mistakes in the case of US banks who learnt so wildly in Latin America).

What is happening to Asia is eerily reminiscent of what happened to East Germany when the Berlin Wall came down. An entirely inappropriate macroeconomic policy — monetary union between the *deutsche mark* and the *ostmark* — ensured that every East German firm was rendered instantaneously uncompetitive

and went bankrupt. The *Treuhand* was set up, took over East Germany's assets and sold them off cheap. East Germany was bought and sold in little more than two years. The price of agreeing to the hostile takeover, which came to be known as the second *anschluss*, was an influx of MacDonald's drive-ins and Volkswagen dealerships.

Perhaps the saddest group in East Berlin after unification was an association of entrepreneurs. Many of them had been imprisoned by the Communist regime for daring to embrace capitalism and, when the wall came down, they thought that their day had come. Many of them set up small businesses, only to find themselves the takeover targets of west German companies. One entrepreneur was literally driven out of business by a west German firm that wanted to buy him out his delivery trucks kept being shunted off the road by his white knight. Many members of his association committed suicide.

East Germany's roads became notorious for "road rage" incidents. There was an astonishing explosion in car crash statistics, explained largely by the fury of west German drivers of fast Mercedes and Audis at being held up by dawdling Trabants.

East Germans were dismissed as country bumpkins by their rich cousins. The peoples of Asia are similarly being written off by triumphalist voices in the West. The Asian model of economic development may be undergoing an unforgiving reassessment but the western model of capitalism is distastefully arrogant and sneering. The Asian economies may come to regret taking the IMF's billions.

Exports' puzzling resilience to strong pound may soon fade

Trade figures are at odds with corporate tales of woe, says Alasdair Murray

For Britain's exporters, 1997 has been marked by the return of the strong pound. Although sterling is now off the peaks reached in August, the pound still hovers uncomfortably close to DM3 — around 20 per cent higher than when it began its surge in late 1996. While policymakers, including the Bank of England and the Chancellor, have paid lip service to the damage the pound can wreak on British manufacturing, they appear as a loss to explain why it has reached such heights when the standard estimates of fair value suggest sterling should only be around DM2.50.

Reports of the harm done to the export sector have been legion in recent months. UK steel firms recently gave warning that they have lost around £1 billion in orders in the past 15 months. British Steel, itself, has seen profits slump by about 45 per cent and is expecting to shed around 2,000 jobs to make up lost ground. Companies ranging from ICI to Diageo have catalogued sterling travails. Studies of the export sector, such as the CBI industrial trends survey, have shown order books at their lowest level for five years.



Exports may have risen because world trade growth outweighs exchange-rate effects, according to one theory

recent data is set for a "significant revision". He says: "All the other evidence is bad, so we can't see why export volumes are apparently still enjoying strong growth."

This discrepancy in data has led even the Bank of England to admit that it finds the relative strength of exports in the face of the strong pound "puzzling". In theory, a sharp increase in currency value should lead to what economists term the "J curve" effect — a brief improvement in the nation's trade balance as the country benefits from cheaper import prices, followed by a sharp deterioration as exports begin to struggle and importers grab an increasing share of the domestic market.

The Bank's analysis is that export volumes have been relatively protected so far because companies have responded to the high pound by shifting their markets to regions where its rise has been less pronounced. Sterling's climb has been concentrated against European currencies and has been much less marked against the US dollar and the myriad currencies that track the greenback — at around 7 per cent, compared with 20 per cent in Europe. Examination of trade data

shows that export volume growth has been especially strong in the US and historically smaller markets such as the Opec countries, Latin America and Eastern Europe. In contrast, export volumes to Germany have slipped.

There is plenty of evidence at corporate level that even relatively small exporters are working hard to find new markets. The House of Darts is a darts manufacturer that exports 97 per cent of its products. Eddie Norman, a partner in the firm, says that it has worked hard at finding new markets, especially in South-East Asia while orders from Germany — its market — have declined. Mr Norman adds: "We are not suffering overall as a business because we have tried harder to find new orders, even in Europe, and increased our range of specialist products."

However, as the Bank admits, there are limitations to this thesis. Not all companies can shift their markets quick-

ly. ICI, for example, expects a 7 per cent drop in turnover this year because of the strong pound. Chris Vallance, corporate treasurer, says that the chemical giant cannot easily shift markets "because our product is not an opportunistic commodity".

The data itself, also indicates another flaw in the alternative market thesis. Export volumes have also risen strongly in countries such as The Netherlands, Spain and Italy where the pound has hit

trade growth has a much greater and more immediate impact on UK export growth than exchange rate movements. As a result, Britain has continued to experience export growth this year, although it is probably losing market share. In contrast, two years ago — when the pound was weak but so was global growth — the UK won a greater share of the export market. The currency-sensitive UK machine-tool manufacturing sector, for instance, is predicting that the value of exports will rise marginally next year because of improved growth in Europe — but will stay below 1996 levels. In short, the strong pound is prompting an export slowdown, rather than a slump.

However, the Morgan Stanley analysis also points to a second important reason for the absence of sharp deterioration in the trade figures — the time lag before a strong currency begins to bite. The Morgan Stanley assessment suggests that it takes six quarters for the full impact of the rise in the real exchange rate to show through, so the first quarter of 1998 could see a sharp widening in the trade balance.

There are some sound practical reasons for believing that

there is a long lag between a surge in the currency and an export slowdown. Many companies have a long lead time for export orders, which can appear in the trade data up to a year after a deal was struck. Big companies are also able to seek some protection from currency hedging. ICI, for instance, has been able to restrict export damage by hedging the forward costs of orders. Exporters have also been able to withstand some of the pressure on sales by cutting their profit margins. After the 1992 devaluation, the UK export sector enjoyed a huge expansion in margins that has left a buffer in the past year.

Importers also seem bound by this time lag, and some may only now be enjoying the chance to cut prices and increase margins. Jon Culverhouse, managing director of Fantastic Fireworks, a London business relying heavily on imported products, says the company operates on a 12-month lead time to try to prevent being caught out by fluctuations in the pound. "We do not really expect to see the impact from the pound for another 12 months," he says.

However, most economists believe that the short term plays that companies can use to guard against a rise in the pound are now unwinding and that a growing deficit is likely to emerge in the next few months. The most recent trade data, has hinted at a slowdown in export volumes.

Import data is also pointing to a gradual deterioration in the deficit. Peter Warburton, UK economist with Robert Fleming Securities, estimates that the index of import volumes has jumped by nearly 19 per cent since early 1995 and that the visible trade deficit is set to climb from £11 billion this year to £21 billion next year — knocking around 1 per cent off growth in gross domestic product.

If global markets can still manage to achieve another healthy year of growth, in spite of the troubles in the Far East, Britain's export sector may still escape the worst impact of the strong pound. However, the evidence suggests that the real pain of sterling's surge may become apparent in the wider economy in 1998. The only solace for Britain's struggling exporters is that a serious widening of the deficit might just persuade the Bank of England later in the year to lower interest rates — at last easing the pressure on the pound.

The bank that broke with tradition for publicity's sake

Chris Ayres on why the Midland let the market men in

There are still some advertisers who think it's a great idea to get company directors to market their own products. One example is Debonair, whose London Underground campaign shows its finance director pleading with the airline's chairman to stop cutting prices. Then there are the television adverts for Prudential, whose chief executive, Sir Peter Davis, is featured strolling along a sunlit beach telling people that the future will be just fine as long as they buy one of his pensions.

The Midland Bank, whose ground-breaking music festival at Battersea Power Station ended on Monday, has thankfully decided to take a different approach. They hold the increasingly fashionable view that traditional forms of promotion — such as billboard advertising and straightforward director endorsements — are no longer effective.

Over the next few months, the bank will decide whether or not its strategy has been a success. However, the Battersea event has already guaranteed the bank an enormous publicity coup for New Year's Day, when the Princess Diana Concert of Hope, held at the festival on December 7, will be shown on Channel 4. The Midland decided to change tactics after it asked KLP, the marketing agency that created Virgin's V92 and Tennant's T in the Park, to think of a new advertising strategy. Paul Morrison, head of marketing at KLP and a confidant of the Spice Girls, responded with an idea loosely modelled on Coca-Cola's Centennial Park at the heart of the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996.

Mr Morrison, 30, earned himself a reputation as a maverick in the marketing industry by staging a rock music and snowboarding event in Red Square, Moscow, for Allied Domecq, the drinks company. The event, to promote Ballantine's whisky, featured the rock band The Prodigy and the world's biggest snowboarding ramp.

KLP suggested to Midland that it create the biggest temporary structure in the world, including an all-day family entertainment centre and a 6,000-seat auditorium, for rock bands, orchestras and comedians. The Midland would be the sole sponsor of the event, and tickets would be offered first to its customers via an enormous direct mail operation.

After much deliberation, the Midland, traditionally associated with pumping sponsorship money into struggling arts events, committed £1 million to the project.

Belinda Furneaux Harris, Midland's head of marketing, said: "We went to KLP and asked them for something which would appeal to 16 to 24 year olds and 25 to 50 year olds. We then had a vast amount of focus groups. At the end of that we found that there was nothing that filled our objectives, and that we wanted to do something different to the competition."

What we were fascinated by were companies which had brought their brands to life. One of the great things about



Morrison: maverick

Paul Morrison's idea was that it would create its own world — Midland.

Although Midland was enthusiastic about KLP's concept, it was worried about moving money away from needy arts organisations to stage a mass-market event. Its fears were partly justified when the strategy met with criticism from sections of the traditional arts establishment.

Midland had sponsored the Proms at the Royal Opera House in London for 25 years, and had also recently ended a 25-year sponsorship deal with the Birmingham Royal Ballet. But the company felt that such deals were being constantly devalued by the increasingly lavish campaigns launched by its non-bank competitors.

Ms Furneaux Harris said: "The changes in financial services have been so phenomenal, we're not really competing against other high street banks, but other brands such as Virgin, Tesco, Sainsbury and even Marks & Spencer. It was a huge jump for us; no one in the sector had done anything like it before." Rival banks looked on in amazement as Midland went about creating the 18-day festival. Not even a soft drinks manufacturer had embarked on such a risky marketing venture in the UK. Instead, Lloyds TSB had a £2 million rugby union deal, Nationwide a £2.5 million football league deal and Royal & Sun Alliance a £3 million yachting deal. Midland's structure, which took three weeks to construct, was the size of six five-a-side football pitches, and weighed 700 tons. Its design attracted the attention of technicians building the Millennium Dome, who have compared notes with KLP's staging specialists.

This week, the structure will be dismantled and kept in storage for future events. More than 170,000 are expected to have visited the building by the end of the festival.

In spite of the hype, the festival got off to a bad start when Battersea Dogs' Home accused Midland of being "grossly irresponsible". The charity objected to the fireworks display that launched the event and in the process sent many of its dogs into a frenzy.

However, once the fireworks had settled, most of the signs were positive. Nearly all the shows sold out, and the family entertainment — which included TV cooks, a Tim Henman tennis clinic, and concerts including Boyzone, Paul Weller and a 600-strong gospel choir — were all warmly welcomed by the media. Not having to personally promote it, Keith Whitson, Midland's chief executive, was seen enjoying himself at the event with his son.

The event's promoters, who took most of the financial risk, had little problem attracting high profile acts. Mr Furneaux Harris said: "I would say it's been 80 per cent successful. We are all extremely proud with what we've achieved. People are realising that we actually created this, rather than just put our name on it."

So pleased is the bank that the venue for next year's event has already been decided.

End of dust-up?

IT IS just possible that one of our longest-running corporate feuds might be heading for a close. I hesitate to approach the matter of James Dyson and Anway, the American corporation, not because the story is so complicated that few can fathom it, but because any mention in the press seems to stir up fresh trouble. Dyson strikes me as a decent sort of chap, and he doesn't need it.

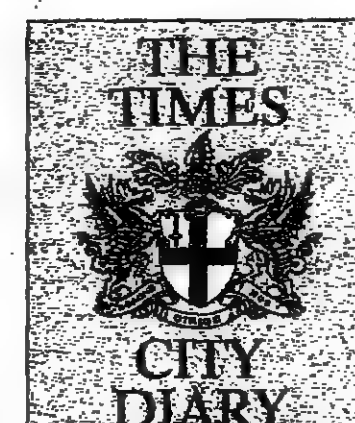
But his company, which makes that super-vacuum cleaner, has just

taken out advertisements in *The Times* and another paper expressing regret for statements made about Anway several years ago. Dyson's quarrel with the Americans dates from the arrival in the late 1980s of a machine they made that seemed rather too similar to his. A legal action was settled, and the courts never found any patent infringement. Yet two documents issued by Dyson suggested they had. Which meant another US court action, this time initiated by Anway, and yesterday's apology. The case continues but, Dyson's office tells me, "I think we are getting nearer. We're hopeful."



Dyson: nature abhors a vacuum but lawyers obviously do not

Branson pickles
BRANSTON & GOTHARD, "a rapidly expanding firm of stockbrokers", is saying here, has spread its wings far afield. To Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, where the company is buying a former branch of Teather & Greenwood. (Interestingly, the shop being bought claims to be the country's first share shop, dating from 1964). But Branson & Gothard's geographical spread does not end there, it seems. Its letter-head mentions London, Frankfurt, Zurich, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Sydney and New York.



Does the broker have branches in all those places, too? "I don't think they do. It's just a designer's device," says an insider sheepishly. Pretentious, you?

Spice racked

IN OCTOBER a British company called the Character Group was pretty chuffed at landing the exclusive contract to produce the official Spice Girls dolls. Chinese workshops were found, and express cargo planes chartered.

The only problem was they would not be ready until after Christmas. A mistake. Virgin Megastores has now grown impatient at missing the

Christmas rush and has snapped up some "unofficial" Spice Girls dolls and is selling them in Oxford Street at £20 a set — a fifth of the planned official price. Unofficial, because while there is no mention of the fab five, the likenesses are pretty obvious. And the dolls are walking off the shelves.

So if enough imposters end up in Christmas stockings tonight, the genuine article might not be so popular when it finally arrives. Or worse still, the cult could be as dead as Power Rangers. Leaving the Character Group with £10 million of unwanted stock. That's showbiz.

AS IF to prove once and for all that accountants are a cold-hearted lot, the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants has forwarded me the results of an extra question included in November's survey of its membership. They were asked which of a clutch of not terribly festive statements best expressed their professional attitude towards Christmas.

A third thought it was good for the economy. 12 per cent believed "Christmas costs my business money because we lose productivity", which suggests a visit from a trio of ghosts soon might be good for their souls. A quarter could not put a cash value on the goodwill in the season of goodwill, but I reckon plenty are now trying to work out how to get it onto the balance sheet. Just 22 per cent were dreaming of a White Christmas.

Inns and outs

A SEASONAL sign of the times to send you on your way, and I can vouch for the accuracy of this one. The scene is a school nativity play. Three tiny tots are on stage. Usps Joseph: "Can we come in, for we are far from home and very tired?" The innkeeper points to Mary: "She can come in, but you can get lost. I want to be Joseph."

Only he didn't say "get lost". Happy Christmas to you all.

MARTIN WALLER



"I'd be over the moon if we could just break even"

NEW MOVIES: Some small, fluffy creatures say 'eh-oh' to our children, and Geoff Brown, in *Spiceworld*

Festive dipsy la-la-la with the telly totties

What film do you want for Christmas? Actually, you have no option. Three hundred prints of *Spiceworld* are blanketing the country, from Penzance to Aberdeen. No permanent harm will be done. The film, as light and ephemeral as a bubble, lasts only an hour and a half, and within a few months it will have vanished from sight, with or without its star attraction, the all-singing, all-shouting, all-gyrating Spice Girls.

The girls themselves — the marketing phenomenon of the age, at least until the Teletubbies arrived — seem aware of their mortality. "And, like, is it all going to be over soon?" Emma (Baby) ponders as the hour of their first live concert approaches. Cue Stephen Fry in a fantasy flash, wearing judge's robes, accusing them of releasing a sub-standard single. In fact, *Spiceworld* might already be too late to capitalise on public frenzy. Shooting occupied June and July, following a script prepared — this is difficult to believe — over the course of a year.

Hot-blooded 12-year-olds, the film's core audience, may trot off to the cinema. But overall, the activities of Baby, Sporty, Scary, Ginger and Posh still seem less likely to get cash registers ringing than the innocent games of Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po.

Still, *Spiceworld* is here, and you need to know its geography. The style and slant recalls the Beatles films of the 1960s, especially *A Hard Day's Night*, another movie devoted to catching a pop group's experience in the teeth of fashion and public acclaim. We follow one crazy week leading up to the girls' concert at the Albert Hall. Richard E. Grant acts badly manic as the group's manager, Alan Cumming, making a TV documentary, acts badly pretentious. Barry Humphries's tabloid press baron, eager for negative news, sends a photographer to spy. American writers pitch desperate ideas for the girls' movie debut. Their last friend Nicola waits out her pregnancy. Celebrities sprinkle cameo appearances (from Roger Moore to Meat Loaf). Aliens visit from outer space. In brief, it's a mess.

A Hard Day's Night doddled and jostled its way too, but did so secure in a knowing director, Richard Lester, a script with at least one foot on the ground and a starring bunch of gifted music-makers with clearly defined personalities. Here the director is Bob Spiers, highly experienced in television comedy, but floored by the challenge of bringing five hyperactive women in large shoes to order. They have their own personalities, to be sure, but you can only catch them in snippets, in between larking about, song belting, and much dressing

Spiceworld
Empire, PG, 92 mins
Best left to 12-year-olds or cultural historians

The Magnificent Ambersons
National Film Theatre
U, 88 mins
Revival of Orson Welles's most humane film

Kitchen
Renoir, 15, 112 mins
Chic and moody tale of grief in Hong Kong

up. The film needs an anchor, but neither the girls nor Kim Fuller's script are in a position to provide it.

And, for all the frenzy, there is something melancholy about *Spiceworld*, so desperate to be of the moment, but actually aware that obsolescence looms. Pop fashions fade. Bursts of confidence in British movies fade. For the way it feeds off a heady period in popular culture, the film can be summed up in a stray remark by the girls' musical director, played by Jools Holland. "That was absolutely perfect," he purrs, "without actually being any good."

The film will certainly not have the staying power of Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons*, a film 55 years old, now revived daily at the National Film Theatre (until January 8) before venturing across the country. The best Christmas present a film buff could wish would be *Ambersons* restored to its director's intentions. But the extensive footage cut following a disastrous preview in 1942 went up in smoke on studio orders later that year. Scenes were not only removed; new footage was shot, not by Welles, and a happy ending tacked on.

But enough splendour survives to make this an adaptation of Booth Tarkington's novel match *Citizen Kane* in cinematic delights. In some respects, indeed, *Ambersons* goes one better than *Kane*. This film has a heart. The director digs deep into characters and feelings as he watches American society in the late 19th century seessaw between aristocratic elegance and the brash automobile age. Welles had a personal stake in these characters, particularly George Minafer, played by Tim Holt, the obnoxious brat whose comeuppance is longed for by all. Welles knew about brats: he was one himself, and appreciated that Hollywood was waiting for the wonder boy to take a fall.

The film also tangles with ambivalence, as the camera caresses the characters' opulent lifestyles and sees both danger and beauty in the march of the automobile. Ev-

ery recent period movie worth a damn, such as Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, tries to ape its irony and poise. But no film can cap the lustrous score by Bernard Herrmann, or Stanley Cortez's sharp-edged photography, or the startling performance of Agnes Moorehead as George's emotionally frustrated Aunt Fanny. Butchered or not, there is only one *Ambersons*.

"No one can shelter you from pain and death, or make that journey for you." Powerful words, these, and the Hong Kong film *Kitchen*, based on a popular Japanese novel and directed by Yim Ho, contains much other food for thought. But you have to hunt for it. You must penetrate acres of gliding, blue-tinted photography, listen to a weepy little tune eight times over, and watch, bemused, as characters keep silent, go berserk, stare at the moon, blur gender lines, or crouch in the fridge.

Grief, plainly, is at the root of things for Louie and Aggie, one a young hairstylist (Jordan Chan), the other a girl driven in on herself by her grandmother's death (Yasuko Tomita, a starlet from Japan). But the fashionably oblique approach of Yim Ho, best known in the West for his thoughtful thriller *The Day the Sun Turned Cold*, makes it hard for us to share their emotional burden.

Much catches the eye. Rain washes over the images. The moon is reflected in a knife blade. Green apples loom through an apartment's blue light. There is something refreshing, too, about Louie's uncomplicated acceptance of his father's sex change. When dealing with pain and death, however, chic visual tricks and off-beat humour are not the most useful companions. See the film, but prepare to be exasperated.

Besides the *Spiceworld* babes, who and what can your children enjoy this Christmas? *The Borrowers* is the best of the bunch, an exuberant, liberty-taking treatment of Mary Norton's book about minuscule scroungers, with imaginative special effects and an agreeable cast (John Goodman, Jim Broadbent).

George of the Jungle offers the genial Brendan Fraser swinging through trees as a clumsy Tarzan, smitten with love for a socialite on safari. And *Prince Valiant*, less polished, bounces along with its Arthurian fantasy and mixed cast; look for Joanna Lumley, not absolutely fabulous, but reasonably striking as the evil witch Morgan Le Fay.

If children want tougher stuff, *Home Alone 3* offers slapstick violence galore, coupled, unfortunately, with minimal imagination. The new Bond, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, is good news for car enthusiasts, but not very rewarding if you like playing with dolls.



Memories of Beatlemania stir as Richard E. Grant leads Baby, Scary, Posh, Sporty and Ginger Spice down a flight of stairs

'The beginning of the end'

OUR panel of young film fans passes judgment on the Fab Five, and chooses the best and worst of 1997

SPICEWORLD

Leslie Isaiah Thomas, 19: Surely the beginning of the end of the Spice Girls. Dom Young, 19: An embarrassing spectacle. Jethro Ankin, 19: Spice foods can sometimes irritate, this movie definitely does. A definite late contender for worst movie of the year. Shearada Osman, 18: A nail in the coffin for the Spice Girls and every person who took a cameo role in the film.

FILMS OF THE YEAR

LESLIE
Best: *Nil by Mouth*: A deeply affecting film about domestic violence. *Career Girls*: Profound and insightful. Worst: *Fever Pitch*: Boring, macho nonsense. I do not want to see this movie ever again.

DOM
Best: *L.A. Confidential*: Cool actors uttering cool dialogue. A definite Oscar contender. *The People vs Larry Flint*: Well-acted and highly entertaining. Worst: *G.I. Jane*: I predicted

the storyline and almost all of the dialogue. Welcome to cliché movie-making.

JETHRO
Best: *Chasing Amy*: Kevin Smith wrote a script so good it could be on the stage. A very funny movie. *Nil by Mouth*: The excellent performances and bold direction from Gary Oldman make this a highly original piece of film-making. I needed Kleenex! Worst: *The Peacemaker*: This disturbingly mediocre film was the first offering from Spielberg's new studio. Hopefully not a sign of things to come.



SHEARADA
Best: *Austin Powers*: I like a good laugh and this had loads of them. *Regeneration*: Pat Barker's novel was adapted into a fine, haunting movie, containing some of the year's best performances. Worst: *Speed 2*: The original *Speed* was funny, a little dark and had urgency by the bucketload. This was one dull ride.

Santa rides again

A Christmas cartoon has emerged out of tragedy

From novice author to peak-time Christmas television writer, is some journey. Geoffrey Sundquist achieves this tomorrow when ITV screens an adaptation of his book and brainchild, *Father Christmas and the Missing Reindeer*.

The voiceovers for the 1500,000 30-minute children's animation are by David Jason. His presence gives the show across-the-board festive appeal, recognised by TV buyers from an astonishing 40 countries — Lebanon to Sierra Leone — who have rushed to buy the programme. Its makers, after all, are Cosgrove Hall, world-class animators with a portfolio of hits including *The Wind in the Willows* and *Peter and the Wolf*.

Sundquist is a 44-year-old former Saatchi marketing man who had never written a story in his life. He began writing after the suicide of his 38-year-old younger brother, Gerry, an actor. He became hooked on heroin, and it was his elder brother who helped him through. "I would pick him up for Sunday lunch at his houseboat at Hampton Court, but this time he had gone under a train," Sundquist says.

The shock was profound. "I had lost happiness. My parents were deeply upset. As the eldest I had to put happiness back into life."

Sundquist released his grief by writing a story of redemption, which tells of Father Christmas trying to find his reindeer, which disappear days before Christmas. He teams up with a poor boy called Simon and, after much tooting on magic horns the reindeer are captured in time for Father Christmas to do his rounds.

Sundquist showed the story to a friend who said "send it to the BBC and ITV". Vanessa Chapman (controller of children's programmes, ITV) wrote back and said: "Love the story. What does it look like?" "Pictures coming," I replied. "I hadn't done any. I came together with Cosgrove Hall, and they got on with it."

HarperCollins commissioned the story as a children's picture book, and on publication this November Sundquist sent a copy down the Thames in his brother's memory. "I dedicated it to Gerry. I wanted something that was part of him to live on," he says.

ALEX WIERATNE
● Father Christmas and the Missing Reindeer will be shown by ITV at noon on Christmas Day

GREAT BRITISH HOPES

Rising stars in the arts firmament

KIRSTY KINNEAR

Age: 23

Profession: Actress

Plans for Christmas: Not content with eating turkey, she'll also be playing one. The bird is the smaller of two, um, meaty roles in David Wood's adaptation of *Babe the Sheep-Pig*, currently wowing the under-tens at the Wythenshawe Forum, Manchester. Her main part, though, is as Old Ma, the sheep who shows Babe that good manners are the key to successful flock control. She auditioned for Wood shortly before leaving the Webber Douglas Academy: "I'd done a bit of work on my 'baa' and was determined to show it off in the audition."

Father figure: She is the daughter of the late comic actor Roy Kinnear and the actress Carmel Cryan. "When I was 13, my Dad saw me playing an octogenarian called Arthur Itis. He found that very amusing and although he didn't want me to become an actress I'm sure he would also have enjoyed *Babe*."

Banned by the Church: While reading drama at Birmingham University she was due to star in David Mamet's explicit comedy, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, on the Edinburgh Fringe. "We were booked into a church hall on Prince's Street, but about 10 days before the run started the vicar read the script, decided the language was too strong and refused to let us. We rushed-released a Caryl Churchill piece instead."

New year's resolution? "I did a lot of classical work at Birmingham, things like *The White Devil* and *The Winter's Tale*, and would like to do more after *Babe*."

DANIEL ROSENTHAL



Britain still deprived of the full monty

MOVIES OF THE YEAR: Our critic finds heartening and depressing trends in his pick of 1997's best films

In 1997 screens continued to be dominated by movie blunderbusses, mostly from Hollywood, exploding with extreme violence, immaculate special effects and scripts and characters too thin to stand upright. A few had outrageousness on their side: *Face/Off*, for instance, and *G.I. Jane*. These took popcorn cinema somewhere new, always preferable to the extreme cases of déjà vu prompted by *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and *Batman & Robin*.

There were also mainstream movies with class, among them *Absolute Power*, *Scream*, *Donnie Brasco* and half of *Contact* (before silliness took hold). Plus, of course, *L.A. Confidential*, the year's best thriller.

But in thinking of the highlights of the year's releases, my mind keeps turning back to far smaller films, imperfect perhaps in assorted ways, but blessed triumphantly with a human face and an imagination stretching beyond the digital witchcraft of computerised effects.

I remember the vulnerabilities of the college friends in Mike Leigh's *Career Girls* and the awkward longings of Sally

the walking wounded of the First World War.

I see the belligerent and battered faces of Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth*, ripped bleeding from real life, and the doughy Finns in Aki Kaurismäki's *Drifting Clouds*, coping with redundancy and other miseries with deadpan aplomb. So many films close us off to ourselves, and teach us nothing: these films lead us inwards.

There are also sparky films, without formal polish, offering quirky testament to the power of cinema and the human spirit. I rejoice in Andrew Kotting's round-Britain ramble, *Gallivant*, in the nonchalant diversions of *Irma Vep*, from Oliver Assayas, and the endearing comedy of the no-budget *Smalltime*, from Britain's newest name to watch, Shane Meadows.

Several things strike me about this list. Six films are British in essence — six-and-a-half if you count the European *Tango Lesson*. New life does seem to be stirring here, especially way down the budget ladder. It is also notable that, by and large, these films have been seen by so few people, even in areas with outlets for independent fare. More people may be going to the movies, but the range available is getting smaller.

Audiences are seeing *The Full Monty* (a huge success, although since this "British" film was bankrolled and distributed by an American company none of its profits will stay in this country), or *The English Patient* (for all the Oscars, not a film that fingers), or *Men in Black* or some



Smalltime made director Shane Meadows the new name to watch in British film

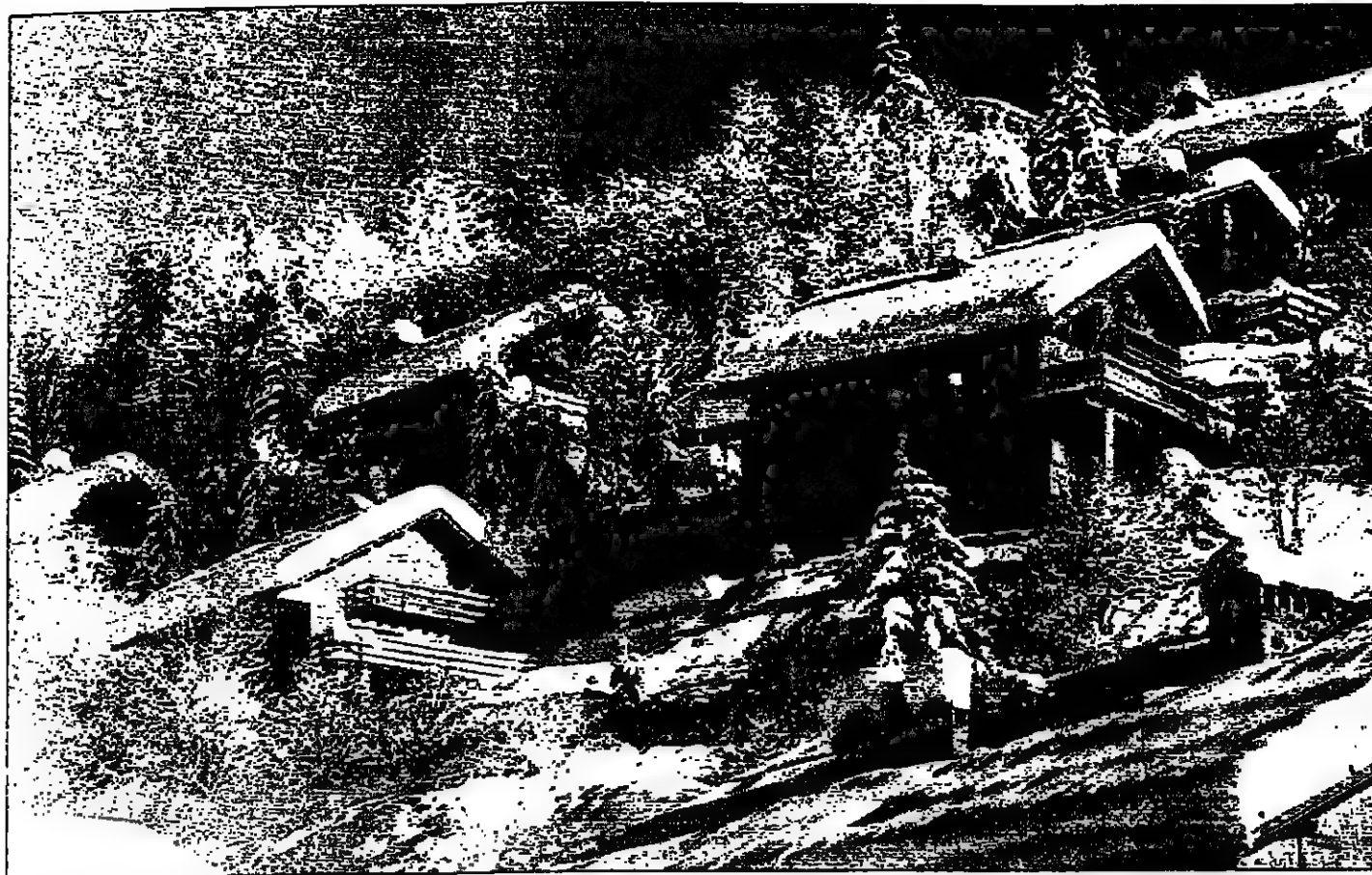
other beneficiary of massive advertising and multiplex exposure. The small film, the foreign film, the oddity: these are endangered species.

It is against this background that any over-excited talk of a British film renaissance must be placed. According to figures in last week's *Screen International* trade paper, 124 films were made here this year, 72 of them financed entirely from British sources. Scarcely a quarter of those 72, however, have found British distributors.

A film only comes alive when it is seen, and urgent action needs to be taken to

loosen the major distributors' grip (a tall order), increase audiences' curiosity, build more screens, or instigate more realistic attitudes among these 'stamping' the lottery honey-pot. But let's get Christmas over with first.

GEOFF BROWN



The five-bedroom Chalet Sorbiers: good value at £360,000? British interest in the ski-chalet market is growing

Time to go for snow

British buyers are back in the Alps. The pound's strength against the French franc, coupled with the severe property recession in France, means that for the first time in seven years interest in the top echelons of the ski-chalet market is growing.

Ziggi Davenport, of the Alpine Apartments Agency in Leominster, Herefordshire (01544 388234), says: "Three years ago, £1 bought a drastically low Fr7.6. Last July sterling soared as high as Fr10.35. Now £1 is worth Fr9.8."

"Easy access to Geneva airport has made the Alps a popular choice for the business executive seeking a European base. The Channel Tunnel has also helped: there are TGV lines with stations at Annecy, Cluses, Moutiers and Bourg-St Maurice. Many British families are moving away from seaside holidays for active pursuits, which the Alps can offer year-round."

"Two years ago, £120,000 might have bought a three-bedroom chalet in the Alps. But clients now have to pay £150,000 to £200,000. For £300,000, a client would expect a

The pound's strength is making a French chalet a good buy, says **Diana Wildman**

chalet in a popular resort with fine views and four bedrooms." UK agents are finding that would-be buyers are after detached chalets costing between £150,000 and £300,000, not, as might be expected, the cheap studios or one-bedroom apartments, which cost about £22,000.

Mrs Davenport says: "Most people buy with rental income in mind. Tour operators know this and are seeking smart, three to five-bedroom chalets. But smart chalets in popular resorts are at a premium: too many international buyers are chasing too few properties."

Alpine Apartments is selling Tapia, a four-bedroom, four-bathroom, fully furnished chalet with a full-length sun terrace, on the ski slope at Méribel, for £330,000. There is no car access in winter. Near by is the five-bedroom Chalet Sorbiers for £360,000.

This shortage of alpine properties surprised Veroni Gilbert from

East Hendred in Oxfordshire when she and her husband Anthony decided to buy a chalet for themselves and their sons aged 16, 13 and 8 last winter.

She says: "We were thinking of moving to a large home with some land in Oxfordshire, but we decided to buy a ski home instead, because we adore skiing. We wanted to be close to Geneva airport to make weekend skiing feasible. We looked at several properties in various resorts and got very depressed."

Eventually, we looked at a large farmhouse in the middle of the slopes above the village of Grand Bournard in the ski region of Chignallion. This turned out to be a vast, seven-bedroom home in a half-acre garden with an open-air swimming pool. We were not looking for something so big, but the price we paid would buy little in

Courchevel or Val-d'Isère. We plan to spend most school holidays there, plus occasional weekends.

"It is easily reached by air or via the Channel Tunnel. But buying the house took ages and although we agreed to buy last January, it was not officially ours until September." The Gilberts paid about £250,000.

Hamptons International has chalets in Méribel from £60,000 to £400,000, including a six-bedroom flat on the first floor at Le Grand Terras, in the residential area of Le Belvedere in the upper part of the main town. There is direct access to the slopes and the ski lifts.

Bill McClintock, of Hamptons, says: "Méribel has an extremely long ski season and is open through the summer, when facilities include an 18-hole golf course, tennis, swimming, riding and walking, as well as ice skating in the 1992 Olympics stadium. The prospect of good rental income is attracting international investors to buy at the top end of the market."

"Although the capital outlay is high, the rental return and capital gain should be higher."

Mouse to find a house

How easy is it to
buy a home on
the Internet?
Katherine Bergen
found out

No time wasted on wearing out shoe leather, no fill-ups of the petrol tank as you travel far and wide to view houses: a personal computer mouse can do much of the work.

Now that property companies are going on the Internet, you can select a property by PC.

The Internet Property Finder (IPF) is one such site. Its subscribers include Savills, Knight Frank, John D. Wood, Cluttons, Humphreys, Jackson Stoops & Staff, Hamptons, Strutt & Parker, Lane Fox, General Accident, Luton Brand and the housebuilder Galliard Homes.

Nicholas Leeming of Humphreys, who helped to set up IPF three years ago, describes it as a "global pool" of agents' data that is constantly updated. "In the next five years," he says, "it will become the common method of seeking property details and will cut down enormously on administration, especially phoning and paperwork."

Sounds wonderful, but put to the test, IPF could not find a house for between £200,000 and £300,000 in London. When the request was changed to a flat, it offered 25 examples. One of these, in a riverside development called Spies Quay and still under construction by Galliard Homes, is on the market for the very specific price of £209,583. The e-mail response options include asking for written sales details, requesting to view the site or even leaving an offer.

Going further afield, IPF conjured up a house with 35 acres of meadows and paddocks at East Dereham in Norfolk. This was one of five properties that appeared in the £400,000 to £500,000 range. Ask for more details and interiors, location and floor plans can all be scrutinised.

The Knight Frank Website gives only the options of London or "country". If you select "country", all properties within your chosen price range will come up. This is fine if you don't mind browsing. But if your heart is set on a particular county, you will have to sift further.

The list, when it appears on screen, is pleasingly clear with a



Web search: a mini-country estate in East Anglia, above, for £500,000, and a large house in Grampian, below, for about £195,000



picture of each home next to basic details. For more details, you can click on to a full-page description of a property.

When a request was placed for a house near Inverness with more than four bedrooms, HomeCo came up with Arradoul House near Elgin, Grampian. The house had recently changed agents, from Wink & McKenzie to Smiths Gore in Elgin (01343 820213), but this had not been updated on the Internet. Smiths Gore is asking about £195,000 and has illustrated the property with five photographs: one aerial and one of the house from the garden, dining room and drawing room.

In response to a request for a building plot in Inverness, Property Network came up with a house site. Munro and Noble is seeking £35,000 for the 1.25-acre site.

Berkeley Homes put its magazine Moves on the Internet 18

months ago. On its Website, each property is helpfully numbered on a map of the county. Paul Vallone, Berkeley's marketing director, says the site gets about 100 inquiries a month and estimates that £1 million in sales can be attributed to the Net. He adds: "In a month or two we will also list details of local schools and transport."

But the future lies with virtual reality "fly-throughs". Now common in the United States, these are special videos that allow buyers to "walk around" the rooms of a home. They give a good impression of dimensions, light and space.

● International Property Finder: <http://www.propertyfinder.co.uk>
● HomeCo: <http://www.homeco.co.uk>
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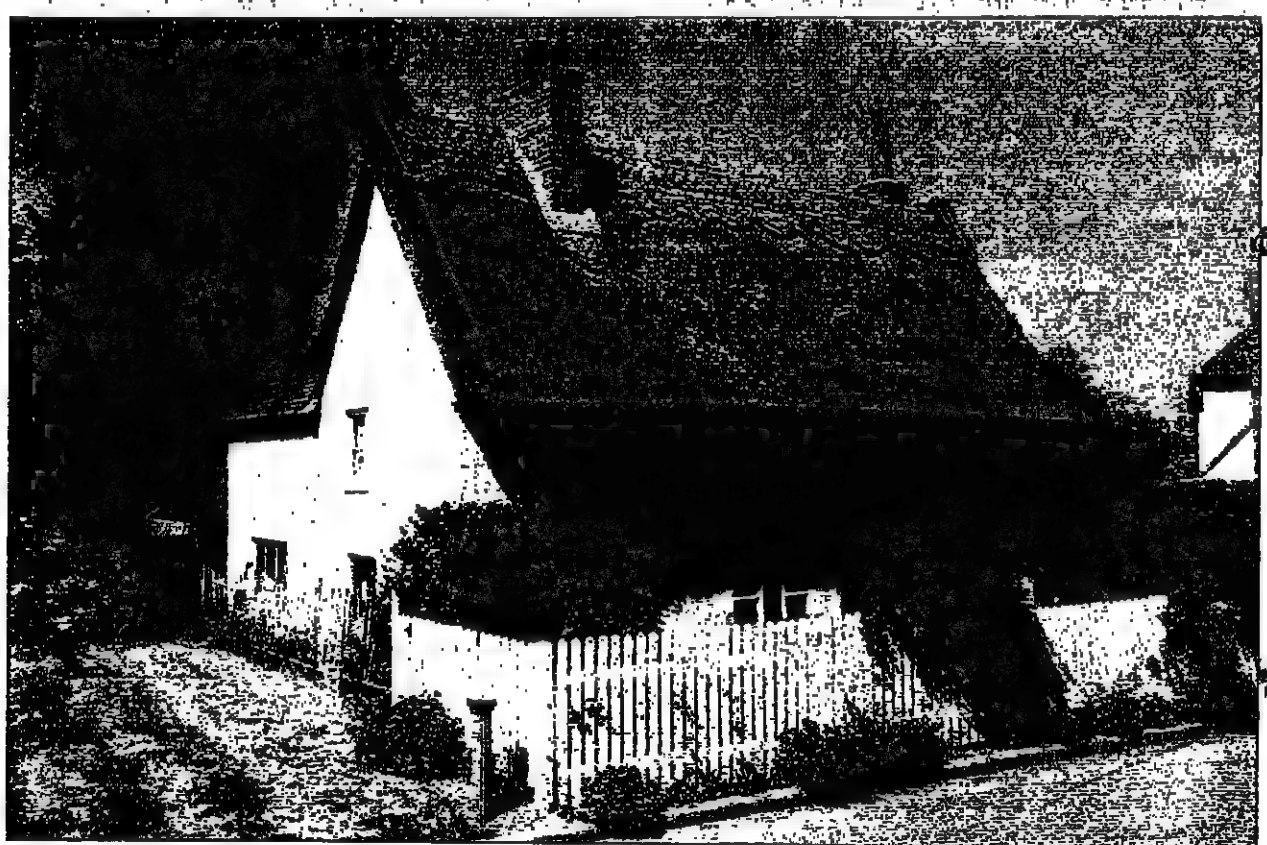
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The price went up by 10 per cent once it was realised that the cottage had belonged to George Orwell

Homes with star quality

The rich and famous are different. While the rest of us pound the streets looking for the perfect house, celebrities use buying agents. But finding the right home, or selling, for a celebrity can be fraught with potential disaster.

The first difficulty is maintaining a complete news embargo if asked to do so. "You can only keep the lid on for a certain amount of time," says Colin Mackenzie of Hamptons. It might be the cleaner, the gardener — sometimes it's even the celebrity's own agent — who spills the beans.

Dawn Carriv of Jackson Stoops & Staff says film stars can be the exception. Michael Caine seemed happy to link his name to the sale of his house in Oxfordshire that cost more than £1.8 million.

However, when Hamptons was trying to sell Susan George's Thameside home, the star insisted on a privacy clause. Viewers were not to know it was her home and all photographs and souvenirs were removed prior to viewing, until it failed to sell. "We eventually persuaded her to go public," says Mr Mackenzie. "While we weren't inundated by *Straw Dogs* aficionados, we did sell."

American film stars are a different issue. Paranoid about security, they would never buy a house once owned by a politician, and the owner of a house in Little Venice, London, will never know if Madonna had really wanted to buy it. Furious that her viewing had leaked to the press, she dropped it like a hot potato.

Such stars have their lawyers draw up detailed confidentiality clauses to be signed by agents and vendors and, if it is

Sue Herdman on the tactics celebrities use when buying or selling

they who are selling, prospective viewers, too.

Television personalities are, according to Robert Bailey of Strutt & Parker, "usually more than willing to expose themselves and their homes". Stars such as Christopher Biggins and Angharad Rees recognise that it is better to be looked over than overlooked. They embrace the press at these times, having a canny eye for publicity and a competitive price for their house.

Pop stars are likely to insist on total privacy, especially if they are family men. If word gets out they will simply withdraw from the sale.

The more *outré* the star, the more conventional the home he or she looks for. Perry Press, of agents Pereds, says: "Most of my clients, including bands like The Who, are after a touch of medieval charm in a rural location."

This is borne out by Atty Bear-Roberts of Knight Frank. His patch covers the Cotswolds and his star clients want complete privacy, preferably out of a village.

He says: "It's often a simple farmhouse they're after with an Aga and three deerhounds."

Once the agent has succeeded in luring some shaggy-haired star drummer to his rural idyll, what is he like to deal with? "Frankly," says Mr Bear-Roberts, "often jolly rude, hours late and with far too

many hangers-on bowing and scraping to his every word."

Karen Carpmel of the Knightsbridge agents W.A. Ellis says: "There are two types of celebrity: those who are low-key and charming and those who are unbelievably arrogant and obnoxious."

Can she name one? "Absolutely not," she says, discreetly but, talking of names, "the second group tend to use their status to get the attention they think they deserve. And they assume money buys anything."

It can be to an agent's advantage if the star requests no publicity. Otherwise, they have to deal with time-wasters.

"Time-wasters," says Ms Carpmel, "often trip up during the initial conversation. Tourists have great stories of 'looking on behalf of friends back home' but are usually delighted with a quick discussion and a couple of glossy brochures to take home."

A celebrity sale does not always add to the value of the house, says Jonathan Hewlett of Savills. In fact, a celebrity connection can detract from the value of a London residence.

"Take Freddie Mercury's old house in Kensington," he says. "It remains a mecca to his fans and the current owners still have to cope with graffiti on their walls."

Out of town, a famous connection can pay dividends, particularly if the famous person was literary. Bryan Bishop, agent in Old Welwyn, Hertfordshire, had a small thatched cottage on their books last summer. When they realised it had been George Orwell's home, featuring in his novel *Animal Farm*, they had "fantastic interest, lots of press coverage and, we reckon, a 10 per cent increase in its value."

SPORT IN BRIEF

New Zealand qualify for meeting with England

CRICKET: England will meet New Zealand in the semi-finals of the women's World Cup in Madras on Boxing Day. New Zealand yesterday had little trouble in defeating Ireland by 139 runs in their quarter-final, played in Bombay. Debbie Hockley and Emily Drummond launched the New Zealand innings with a partnership of 121 and the team total of 244 for three was well out of range of Ireland, who struggled to 105 for nine in their 50 overs. Only three players reached double figures, Adele Spence, with 18, finishing as top scorer.

Miami Blues

AMERICAN FOOTBALL: Mario Grier and Dave Meggett ran for second-half touchdowns as the New England Patriots beat Miami Dolphins 14-12 on Monday night to win the AFC East title and gain home advantage in next week's rematch against the Dolphins in the playoffs. Miami have not won an away game in the post-season since 1974.

China on standby

MOTOR RACING: China could stage a Formula One grand prix next year at a new track in the southern city of Zhuhai. The circuit is one of two reserve venues — South Africa's Kyalami track is the other — if either the Belgium or Portugal races are withdrawn, according to reports in Hong Kong.

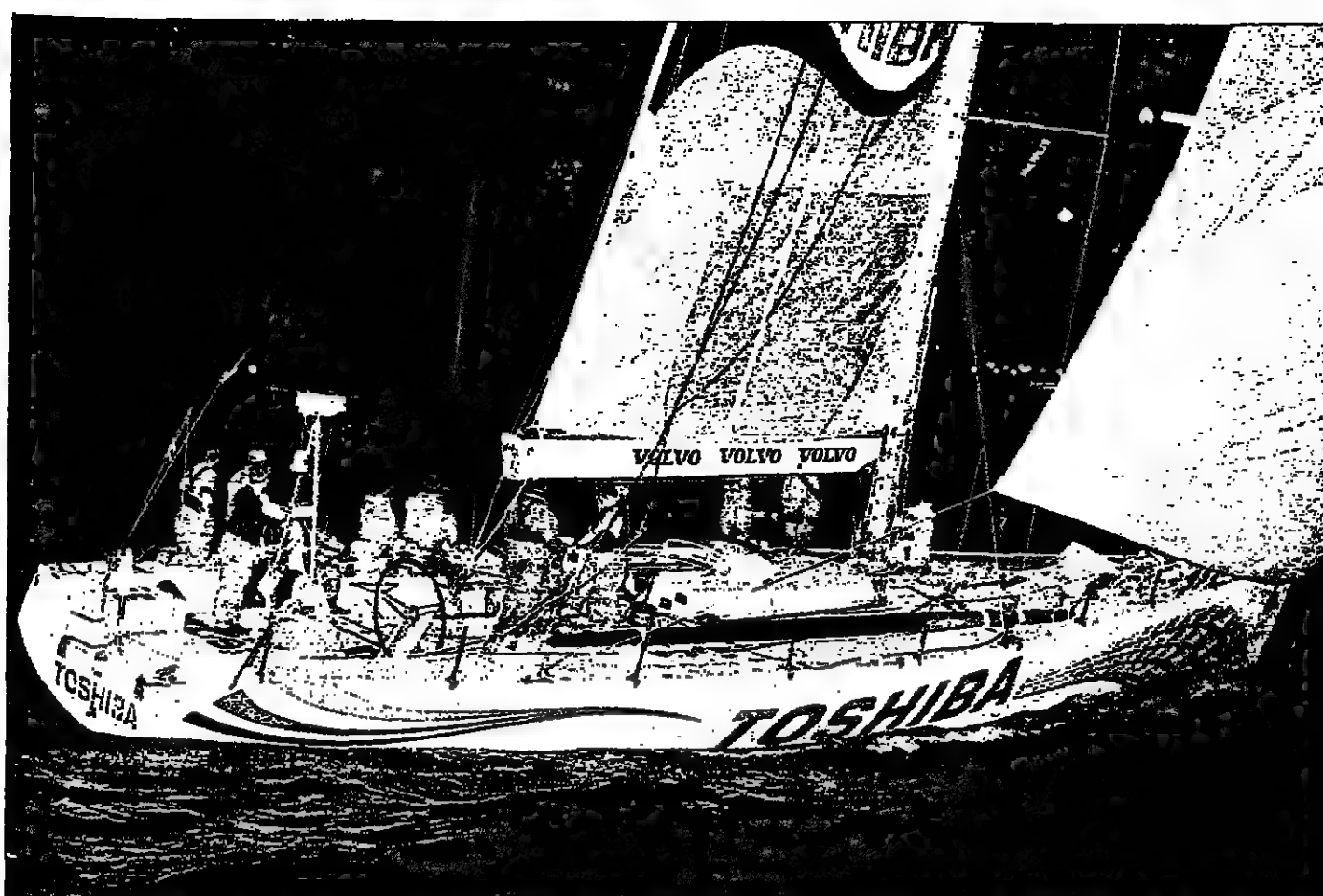
Fernandez regrets

TENNIS: Mary Joe Fernandez, of the United States, has withdrawn from next month's Australian Open because of a wrist injury. Fernandez, ranked No 11 in the world, has twice been runner-up in the event, losing to Steffi Graf in 1990 and Monica Seles in 1992.

Barcelona bound

HOCKEY: Lauren and Annie Williams, the daughters of the legendary rugby union player, P. R. Williams, are among the 26 players chosen for a Great Britain development camp in Barcelona next month.

Darkest moment follows dawning of grim reality



Toshiba arrives in Sydney in sixth place, thanks to a frantic late surge after slipping from third to last in a single, baffling night

Sidelined en route to Sydney

Up until the point when things went wrong for us, we had had a good third leg on Toshiba, disputing the lead with EF Langauge coming across the Great Australian Bight. The fleet had developed a big separation, north and south of about 100 miles, which we all thought was going to be the deciding factor. We didn't expect it to condense to just 25 miles from first to last in the Bass Strait and we came through there in the top three, only six miles behind the leader.

Going up the Australian coast, there were varying wind strengths inshore and offshore and it was a game of getting the most velocity. Two days before the finish, when Toshiba was between Wilson's Promontory and Cape Howe off the Victoria coast, the only boat next to us was BrunelSunergy, which was in sight as the day wore on. It was one of those moments when we just had to choose a way to go. It was nothing radical, not really a big decision in the whole race, or a case of shallow-going or shall-we-go out. It was just sailing on and keeping in touch and covering Brunel.

The other boats went out of sight

Paul Standbridge, skipper of Toshiba, reflects on the latest leg of the Whitbread race

during the evening and the wind shift tended to put us in towards the coast. Again it was nothing we really talked about or queried, it was just natural. You've got to sail somewhere, so off we went. As night set in, the wind got lighter and lighter and we thought: "Yikes, this could be a bit scary. I hope the others are having a calm patch, too." Then the wind filled in off the land, as it does, and we sailed along the coastline and we thought it was probably OK — no big deal — that is until we got the position schedule in the morning and found we were in eighth place.

When you are skipper, whenever

the going is good, you get a certain amount of glory and when the going gets bad, you get the blame pure and simple — and quite rightly so, because you have to take the rough with the smooth. So you do feel worse as captain. You think: "Jesus, that is actually my responsibility."

The clock was ticking after that and the miles were slipping away. One shouldn't use the girls as too much of a boat to beat because of our chauvinistic attitudes, but they are and that is the bottom line. So I was very nervous about being beaten, not only by the girls but by eight other boats.

We worked very hard after that. I didn't need to motivate the crew to get them out of last place — it goes without saying. We were all looking at each other and saying: "Right, we're getting out of here." So we started working hard, or I should say continued to work hard, because we worked hard the whole time. If you don't, you'll be left behind. Although getting to Sydney

in sixth place was not what we would have wanted at the start of the leg, we were very relieved not to get there last.

Obviously, there is a little bit of form beginning to show in the race now. I wouldn't read too much into it at the moment. We're still not panicking.

After leg one, you come in sixth and you say that's OK, it's one bad race in a nine-race regatta. But, of course, time is going to run out and we can't say that forever. But the same thing does apply: we have done three races out of nine and we are in seventh and I am not particularly happy with that. The good side is that we are only one point off sixth, though I don't particularly want to be sixth either.

At this stage in the game, I still think any one of the leading seven boats is capable of winning. People normally win this race by default — in the last race Tokyo's dismasting let Yamaha through. This time it will probably be the same. Then, purely on the mathematics, anyone could win and the top three boats are all going to have some bad legs. Paul Cayard is probably the least likely to slip up badly because he's proving to be very good.

Klinsmann's bid to turn back time doomed to failure

SIMON BARNES



Midweek View

Jürgen Klinsmann's triumphant return to Tottenham Hotspur takes me back to a place in the south of Crete. It was a speck of a village called Agia Galini, and I loved it and I was happy there. That's all, really. No pen recorded either visit, no eyes but mine read the words.

I first went there in 1970. Agia Galini had perhaps less than a dozen foreign visitors. It was pretty hard to get to, a five-mile hike under fierce sun from the nearest road. And we swam and sat about in cafes and talked and talked and were made quite welcome. That's all, really.

Two years later, the place was a throbbing tourist resort. Stalls everywhere selling tat. Every house a boarding house. The amiable, moustached proprietor now a harassed and successful businessman. Agia Galini had lost its innocence, and so had I. And I resolved then never go back. It is a mistake that people make throughout life that you can go back to a place, a person, a job, a life that made you happy. Klinsmann's return to Spurs seems, at least on the face of it, to be entirely prompted by this mistaken view of life.

Call it Klinsmann's Error. It is one to which football people are greatly inclined. They have the sense of appropriateness that is better used as an aspect of the craft of writing novels. If it seems somehow appropriate, it has to be right. So Klinsmann comes back. He had one wonderful season with Spurs in which he scored 29 goals, was footballer of the year and charmed the pants off everyone in a manner that even Ruud Gullit cannot aspire to. He comes back as if such a year can be had for the asking: the magic of the appropriate return will make everything come out right.

Football is littered with tales of magnificently appropriate returns and their inevitable failure. Howard Kendall, at Everton, is a troubled man at a troubled club. His return to the club he managed so gloriously was intended to put an end to trouble. At Spurs the appointment of Osvaldo Ardiles as manager was a step to an inevitably glorious future. Ardiles had been the most dramatic signing in the history of English football when, in 1978, he was a World Cup winner with Argentina, crossing the world to play football for Spurs and doing so with huge distinction.

His return as manager was expected to complete the circle

with cosmic appropriateness, a novelist's simple turn of the plot that led inevitably to the happy ending. But it was a hideous mess.

You cannot go back to old loves expecting the same joys of discovery. How many times can you lose your virginity, after all? An overworked and oppressed journalist on a national newspaper might feel nostalgic about the local paper he worked on as a youth, but he returns there at his peril. I am occasionally nostalgic about my days of freelancing around Asia — but go back to it? Hong Kong has changed beyond recognition, and so have I. That is not politics, it is Time.

The glorious return is nothing less than a fight against Time, an attempt to force the hands to move counterclockwise by sheer force of will. As such, it can do nothing but fail.

Time, however, has softened the severity of the rule I made as I left Agia Galini for the last time. I will go back to places now. I have been back to Hong Kong and I keep returning to my beloved Luangwa Valley in Zambia. I tell myself it is all right to go back, but don't go looking for what you found last time. Nothing stays the same, especially not yourself. That is by way of being the definition of being alive.

RUGBY UNION: ENGLISH CLUBS ANGERED BY MINOR FORMAT CHANGES

Threat to boycott cup increases

By MARK SOUSTER

THE prospect of a boycott of the Heineken Cup by England's leading clubs looked a distinct possibility last night after what appeared to be only cosmetic changes to the structure and schedule of next season's competition.

The directors of the European Rugby Cup Ltd (ERC) have scrapped one round of the tournament — the quarter-finals play-offs — which has reduced its length from ten weeks to nine. Next season the quarter-finals will consist of the five pool winners, plus the three best runners-up.

The competition has been put back three weeks from this year's start date to enable clubs to play at least the opening six league games in the Allied Dunbar Premiership, which kicks off on August 22.

The pool matches will be played between October 3 and November 7, a section of the season that the clubs feel cuts right across the domestic competition they are striving to establish on a meaningful and uninterrupted basis.

On top of that, the situation is exacerbated next season because of World Cup qualifying games involving England, Scotland, Ireland and Italy, as well as pre-Christmas internationals for which the last three weeks of November and the first week of December have been set aside.

Another large hole in the autumn schedule will not appeal to owners and investors, most of whom would rather see the Heineken Cup run as a thread throughout the season or rescheduled after Christmas as a build-up to the five nations' championship. Some are already reluctant to enter the European Competition.

David Buchanan, the president of Richmond, said yesterday that the real issues had not been addressed and that a meeting would be held to discuss the ramifications early in the New Year. "We have to

look very seriously at whether we wish to participate in Europe. The options we had hoped would be available to us are not. It doesn't do the game's sponsors or individual sponsors any good if we have a few weeks of domestic rugby, then switch the lights out again. It will never build our game. We have to consider the full implications of what ERC has come up with and decide whether we wish to play in it."

Charles Levison, one of the English directors on the ERC board which met in Dublin last Friday, said that progress had been made on some of the concerns in England and France about the organisation of the Heineken Cup. The deferral of the start of the cup next season was a "substantial improvement", he said. However, he agreed that the possibility of a boycott was a "serious consideration".

"It doesn't just relate to the structure of the season, but also the division of moneys and the quality of sides," he added.

Saracens without Hill

RICHARD HILL, Saracens' England flanker, has a hamstring injury and will miss the Allied Dunbar Premiership game with Leicester on Boxing Day. The match, one of the most important in Saracens' history, is sure to draw the biggest crowd yet to the team's new home at Watford. Alex Bennett, from Orrell, replaces Hill.

Saracens sit proudly on top of the Premiership but their

championship credentials will be tested to the full by Leicester, who beat Harlequins 27-3 last Saturday. Damian Hopley, 27, of Wasps, the former England centre, will miss the rest of the season because of the recurrence of the knee injury which has blighted his career. Steve Ojomoh, the Bath flanker, is expected to join either Gloucester or Sale before the end of the year.

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SHEEHAN on BRIDGE

By ROBERT SHEEHAN, BRIDGE CORRESPONDENT

More fireworks from the Goldway-Pavlovics OKBridge challenge match that I mentioned yesterday. Newcomers to this online bridge club are amazed at the speed of play, which is normally no slower than face-to-face bridge. This increases the potential for addiction. The unofficial record for most hands played in a week (710) is held by Mary Vickers of Boston, Massachusetts, when she was at a loose end: her house was isolated in a snowstorm.

Dealer West	North-South game	IMPs
10 4 3	AKQ8	672
K J 10 8 5 4 2	9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	AKQ8
3	AKQ8	AKQ8
J 10	AKQ8	AKQ8

W	N	E	S
Pavlovics 4 H Pass	Goldway Double Pass	Pavlovics Pass Double	Soloway 5 C All Pass

Contract: Five Clubs doubled, by South. Lead: three of diamonds

Declarer rose with the ace of diamonds at trick one to hold his losses to a diamond, a heart, two clubs and a diamond ruff, conceding 800. Meanwhile, Four Hearts would have lost three spades and a trick in each minor for -300. Where did North-South go wrong in the bidding?

Few experienced pairs play a double of a Four Heart opener as purely penalties. The preferred definition ranges from "informative", showing a good hand, usually including spade tolerance, to "take-out", showing a three-suiter. If Goldway plays the double as take-out, then North

WORD-WATCHING

By Philip Howard

OCOTE
a. An Aztec Indian tripe
b. A pine
c. A desert marsupial

RAMBLA
a. A Spanish hiker
b. A shanty
c. A ravine

RUBINETTO
a. A deep red dye
b. A bullfighter's rosette
c. A tap

QUEBRADA
a. A mountain stream
b. "What impudence!"
c. Writing by knots

Answers on page 33

KEENE on CHESS

By RAYMOND KEENE, CHESS CORRESPONDENT

British triumph

Nigel Short and Michael Adams have achieved the extraordinary feat of reaching the semi-finals of the qualifying section of the Fide world championship in Groningen, Holland. In the first round of the semi-finals, Anand drew with Gelfand, while Adams beat Short. Although one of the British grandmasters will be eliminated, there will, therefore, be one British grandmaster in the final eliminator that determines the challenger to Anatoly Karpov, the reigning Fide champion.

The clash between Short and Adams will also settle the vexed question of who is now the strongest British player. Although Short has already played one world title match, and continues to head the British Chess Federation team, Adams has overtaken him in the ratings.

In the quarter-final Adams had a tough match against the Dutch grandmaster Loek van Wely, winning when Van Wely lost on time in the play-off section.

White: Michael Adams
Black: Loek van Wely
Fide world championship Groningen, December 1997

Trompovsky Attack

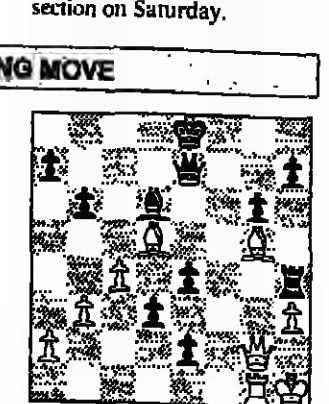
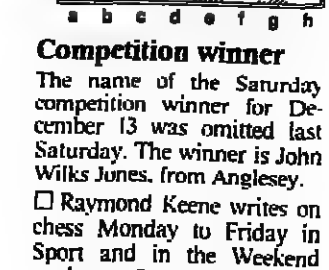
1	d4
2	d5
3	Bd4
4	Bd3
5	Bd3
6	Bd3
7	Bd3
8	Bd3
9	Bd3
10	Bd3
11	Bd3

WINNING MOVE

By Raymond Keene

Black to play. This position is from the game McNab - Plaskett, Hastings 1996. Black has an army of central pawns marching down the board but has to deal with the threats to his queen and rook. What is the best way to go about this?

Solution on page 33



FOOTBALL

Smith graduates from Oxford to reinforce Albion

By RICHARD HOBSON AND RUSSELL KEMPSON

WEST Bromwich Albion yesterday appointed Denis Smith as their new manager. Smith, 45, impressed the club's board of directors when he was interviewed for the vacant position on Monday and Albion were quick to agree a compensation payment with Oxford United, the club that Smith has managed since 1993.

Although Albion, fourth in the Nationwide League first division, said that money will be available for transfers, they were impressed with the way Smith took Oxford into the first division two seasons ago, and has avoided relegation since on a tight budget. Smith effectively put all of his players up for sale recently because of the parlous financial situation at Oxford.

Tony Hale, the Albion

chairman, wanted to delay making a choice until the new year, but a run of four defeats in the past five matches has prompted a swifter decision. Those results also undermined the prospects of John Trewick, the coach, who had applied for the job.

Hale had originally targeted Joe Royle, who led Oldham Athletic into the top flight in 1991. However, after applying for the post, Royle subsequently pulled out to pursue the chance to manage Northern Ireland.

Wim Van Hanegem, one of the leading lights in the gifted Holland side of the 1970s and presently the coach of AZ Alkmaar, was considered too big a gamble with Albion well placed to challenge for promotion.

Ray Harford became the club's eighth manager since 1987 when he was appointed last February, but left for Queens Park Rangers in acrimonious circumstances earlier this month.

Coventry City yesterday completed the signing of Viorel Moldovan, the Romania striker, for £4 million from Grasshopper of Zurich. He has agreed a 4½-year contract, but is not expected to arrive at Highfield Road until the new year. Moldovan, 25, led the scoring in group eight of the World Cup qualifying series with seven goals and will pose a threat to England when the countries meet in group G of the World Cup finals in Toulouse on June 22.

Tony Adams, the Arsenal captain, will not play again until the end of January because of a back injury. If he takes longer to recover than expected, he could miss England's World Cup warm-up match against Chile at Wembley on February 11.

Arsene Wenger, the Arsenal manager, said: "He's been to see a specialist about it and he'll need to have the right amount of rest. He'll not be able to train for at least two weeks."

Gary Speed, the captain of Everton, is doubtful for the FA Carling Premiership match against Manchester United at Old Trafford on Boxing Day after damaging an ankle in training.

"Gary has handled these past few weeks very well," Howard Kendall, the Everton manager, said. "The pressure has been on him and the other lads but they've battled so hard in difficult circumstances. His injury is a problem I could do without."

Norwich City have turned down an offer of £1 million from Crystal Palace for Craig Bellamy, 18, the Wales Under-21 midfielder.

Jason Bowen, the Wales and Birmingham City midfielder, has joined Reading for a fee of £200,000. Bowen, 25, has played for Southampton on loan this season.

Hard Nock learns knack of winning

SARAH POTTER



My mind was filled with some crabbily alliterative preconceptions of the National Hunt set (big bottoms, buck teeth, braying accents) as I reached Stow-on-the-Wold and the first steaming piles of horse droppings. It seemed an effort to step around such prejudice as I pulled up in the damp fog to meet Susan Nock, the trainer.

An unexpected pleasure then, that the driving force behind Senor El Betruti, perhaps the season's most improved horse, turned out to be such an engaging thoroughbred in the finest English tradition. Modest, humorous and quietly courageous.

Nock, 53, should be preparing her eight-year-old grey, owned by her husband, Gerard, for the King George VI Chase at Kempton Park on Boxing Day. It is no secret that the soggy weather might scupper their chances — he hates soft ground — but a crushing personal blow has made it even more difficult for Nock to focus on what should be her most exciting sporting challenge.

A few hours after our meeting, Nock's mother died in the Cirencester hospital where she had been battling against acute osteoporosis. Nock and her two sisters had been sharing the bedside vigil for several days. "She slipped away late in the night as I held her hand. I was relieved it was so peaceful," she said. "The family will come together for Christmas, but it will be a difficult time."

Seasonal goodwill has been flooding in to their Gloucestershire farmhouse since Senor El Betruti trounced the more favoured runners in the Tripleprint Gold Cup 11 days ago. A month earlier he had galloped off with the Murphy's Gold Cup at an unfancied 33-1. One happy punter, who wrote to say that he had bought all his Christmas presents out of his winnings, sent Nock £5 to buy the horse a gift. She speaks



Nock, left, has high hopes for her grey, Senor El Betruti, at Kempton on Boxing Day

the ponies on the way and they kept him occupied while I came up huffing and puffing behind him."

Nock's image is that of a bossy, scatter-brained amateur. Her friend and fellow trainer, Nigel Twiston-Davies, nicknamed her Hyacinth Bucket, after the character in *Keeping Up Appearances*. It is largely tongue-in-cheek, but Nock is happy to play the part. "People have really latched on to that," she said with a laugh. "Some say it's very apt because I am bossy. I do spend a lot of time reminding the trainers about their general behaviour, but it's a tough life, so the language gets tough, too."

She has only been a trainer for two years and employs one method that would not be universally popular. "The only thing we do differently is that all our horses go hunting," she said. "It gets them fitter and they learn to look after themselves. It has certainly improved the grey

'I am bossy and spend a lot of time reminding trainers about their behaviour'

horse. He used to be a bit of a wimp, but he's a lot tougher now."

Trainers usually claim that the toughest part is working for demanding owners. It is one reason why Nock has no intention of expanding. "We do it for fun here," she said. "I have one owner and he's quite difficult. I have to live with him as well and I just can't imagine having to take on any more horses or owners. As it is my husband who is the owner, I'm the trainer and the children are the slaves."

"We were all there at Cheltenham, in the winner's enclosure, causing chaos. It doesn't happen often, so we enjoyed it and made the most of it."

As I squelched back across the yard, I had to acknowledge that Susan Nock had changed some of my ideas about racing. We had forged a bond where I had not expected one. It was refreshing to meet her, no matter how many horses lift their tails on the road ahead.

Aberdeen put majority of squad up for sale

By KEVIN MCCARRA

THE entire Aberdeen squad, bar two players, has been put up for sale. Alex Miller, the new manager, would probably be eager to retain only Jim Leighton, the Scotland goalkeeper, and Derek Whyte, who has just arrived in a £200,000 transfer from Middlesbrough.

Miller has invited offers. "If anybody out there wants to give me a phone, they can do," he said. Miller replaced Roy Aitken last month and, although Aberdeen have not won any of his four games in charge, candour is serving as a substitute for points. "We've heard more common sense from the manager in the past four weeks than we've heard from the club in the past four years," one shareholder said at the annual meeting on Monday.

A realistic outlook, though, will scarcely be enough to restore the club to health. Aberdeen are at the foot of the Bell's Scottish League premier division and debts of

around £2.5 million limit Miller's room for manoeuvre.

Over the past few years, Aberdeen have spent increasing sums on a team of diminishing effectiveness. The poor form of well-paid players has also disrupted plans for a share issue, once predicted to raise as much as £10 million, but Aberdeen will now proceed with caution. The first phase of a two-stage deal should go ahead in the spring and is already close to being fully subscribed.

Some of the cash must be placed in the manager's hands. Although relegation may be unthinkable, practical steps are needed if it is to be avoided. Miller's announcement of a readiness to sell virtually all the players is, in essence, a symbolic gesture. It signals a willingness to be ruthless, but, in fact, other clubs will take little interest in players on handsome contracts who have taken Aberdeen into so drastic a position.

Test your knowledge with the Jumbo Sports Crossword

THE TIMES presents the traditional festive challenge of the Jumbo Sports Crossword to test your knowledge over the holiday period — with a methuselah of Moët & Chandon champagne going to the winner and copies of the sports book of the year for the six runners-up.

The sender of the first correct entry drawn will receive champagne to the value of £250 while *A Lot Of Hard Yakka*, by Simon Hughes, goes to the next six correct entries. *A Lot Of Hard*



Yakka, an amusing and refreshingly honest diary of Hughes's 15 years as a county cricketer, won the William Hill sports book of the year award for 1997. It is published by Headline at £16.99.

Send your completed crossword with your name, address and daytime telephone number to:

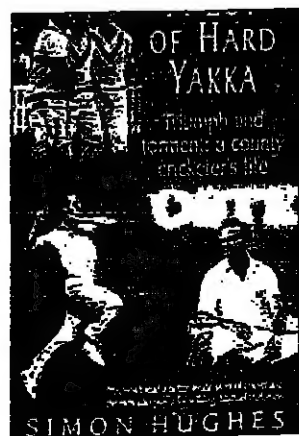
Jumbo Sports Crossword
Sports Department,
The Times,
1 Pennington Street,
London E1 9KN

to arrive by Friday January 9, 1998. The solution and winners will be published on Wednesday, January 14. The sports editor's decision is final. Usual rules apply. No correspondence.



ACROSS

- 1 Send freed footballers to tackle the job (9)
- 6 Very able goalkeeper (6)
- 9 Burning bright in William Blake's forest? (5,5)
- 14 Southpaw, for instance (10)
- 15 See the screen from the middle (5)
- 16 Second man to break the four-minute mile (5)
- 17 Paul, ex-England, Yorkshire and Essex wicketkeeper (4)
- 21 Lifts the ball on court (4)
- 22 Colin Cowdrey's nickname in his pre-skipper smoking days? (6)
- 23 Child's play from this Lord's end? (7)
- 24 Billy, who captained and managed West Ham (5)
- 26 Go forth and fight for Connell (5)
- 27 Hole 'n' in for a 1978 Dutch World Cup star (7)
- 29 Cabinet collections (8)
- 32 Colour of the prize for an environmentally friendly WBC champion? (5,4)
- 34 What the board director may do for sport (4)
- 35 Span of sporting activity (6)
- 36 Where Juventus are at home (5)
- 38 Walker Lynam? (3)
- 39 He has had 375 and 501 alongside his name (4)
- 40 They have enjoyed a shower of rugby honours (4)
- 41 A hands on art (6)
- 42 Polish top scorer in the 1974 World Cup finals (4)
- 44 You can find golfers and racehorses on it (6)
- 45 Smart shop at London Road? (4)
- 46 Appealing place? (3)
- 48 Underwood or Greig, for instance (4)



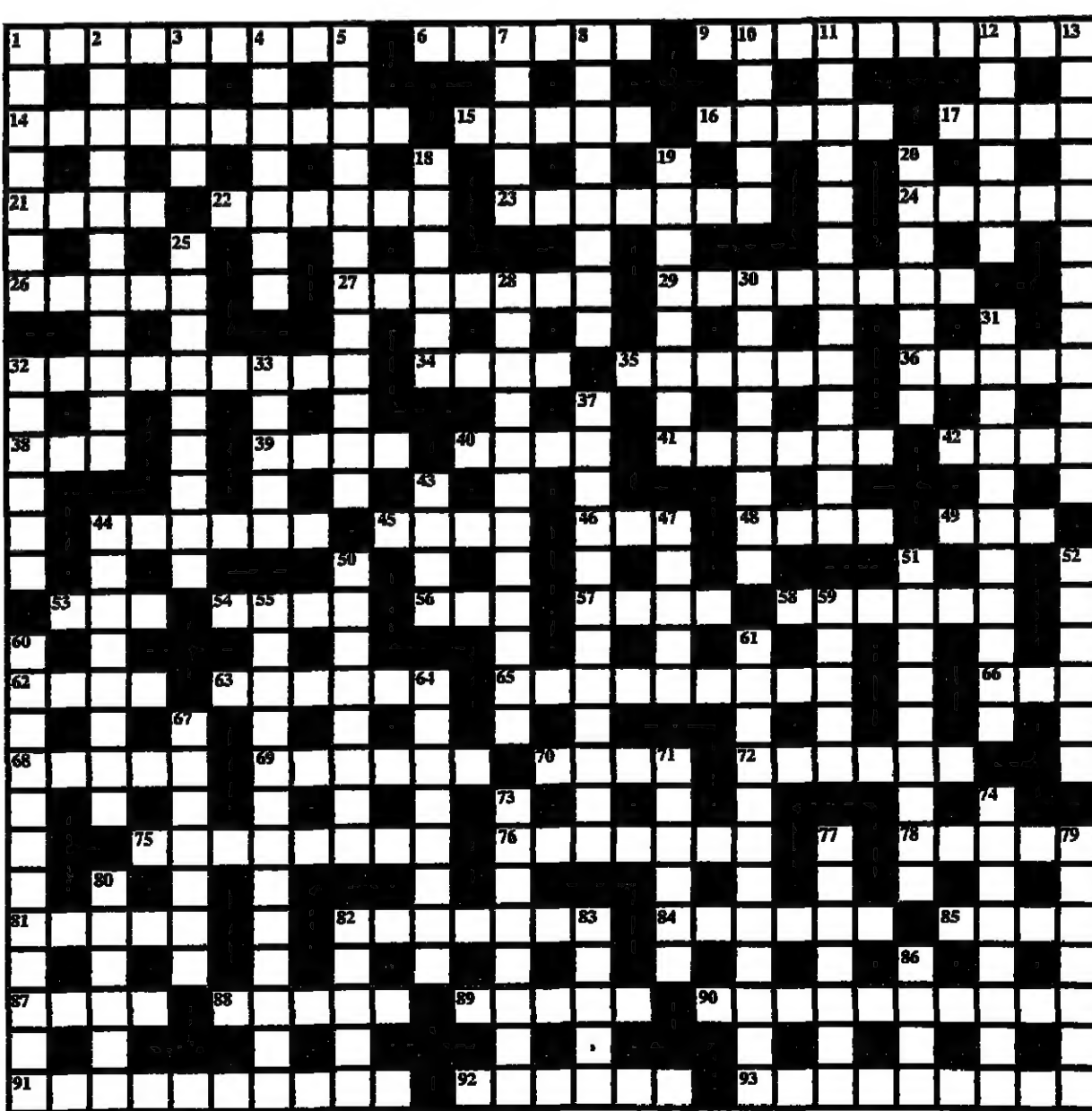
Six runners-up win *A Lot Of Hard Yakka*

DOWN

- 49 It could be Chris or his brother Alan (3)
- 53 Make the effort to cross the line (3)
- 54 It often comes with the pain of defeat (4)
- 56 Number of goals once put into the net by Joe Payne (3)
- 57 Cup encounters (4)
- 58 Promoter who has bawrowed into boxing (6)
- 62 It often seems long for the England cricket team (4)
- 63 Chris Boardman does it faster than most (6)
- 65 Level game (4,5)
- 66 There and back, a beefy Grand National winner? (3)
- 68 Grizzly North London defender? (5)
- 69 American football transfer transactions (6)
- 70 Perrie, a South African break builder (4)
- 72 Sporting deliveries (6)
- 75 19 for 90 was his record return (3,5)
- 76 Let the punch or the greyhound go (7)
- 78 Set the same time (5)
- 81 Bridge of cricket (5)
- 82 Dan held the ball for a change (7)
- 84 Where you will be if cricketers in The Parks (6)
- 85 Roaring connection between Vienna and Lofly (4)
- 87 Berkovic of West Ham, not Yale (4)
- 88 Improve with the RAC? (5)
- 89 It described Fred Trueman in the heat of battle (5)
- 90 Rocky Marciano was this from the first bell (10)
- 91 He really counts in boxing (10)
- 92 They figure in the rugby calendar (6)
- 93 An Olympic silver medallist with Neil Broad (3,6)
- 1 Johnny Won't Hit Today? (7)
- 2 They get a kick out of sport (11)
- 3 For anglers or cricketers (4)
- 4 Matthew Fleming, for example, is an Old one (7)
- 5 It can be gradually deflating for the GP driver (4,8)
- 7 Far East Games (5)
- 8 Eat north for the captain (8)
- 10 World Cup winners for the first time in 1934 (5)
- 11 Athletic and steady cueman Down Under (5,8)
- 12 Club found in the east (6)
- 13 Was he once the fastest man about the House? (9,3)
- 18 Trains the Oilers? (6)
- 19 Position in which Ray Wilson was supreme (4,4)
- 20 Protests at the racetrack (7)
- 25 Place for horses, ropes and bars (9)
- 28 Did he have a large bite of glory with Leeds? (6,6)
- 30 Cricket tempo (4,4)
- 31 All stopped him in three

rounds in the capital (5,6)

- 32 John, a right back capped by England when with Villa (6)
- 33 William Webb, of the historic hands (5)
- 37 Causes slight damage close to the green? (5,3,4)
- 43 Stop for the upright (4)
- 44 Connor, who may not need a sweater when bowling for Hants (8)
- 47 Mile for elite but sleepy runners? (5)
- 50 England flanker who sounds better suited to the three-quarters (4,4)
- 51 Flannelled foot? (9)
- 52 Leap to one of the fastest of all games (6)
- 55 A team that makes an exhibition of itself? (7,6)
- 59 Remains to be seen at the cricket HQ (5)
- 60 Likely first punch from a boxer (6,4)
- 61 A referee will often intervene to do this (4,3,5)
- 64 What the driver is doing at the wheel (8)
- 67 Takes passing interest in helping to create a goal (7)
- 71 Just the picket for regular supporters (6)
- 73 Some people think it's all over. It is now! (4,4)
- 74 I slip mug for this old noble art (8)
- 77 Sam, who handled with care at The Valley (7)
- 79 A long, perhaps light jaw that can turn to glass in the ring (7)
- 80 Stay composed in still yachting conditions (6)
- 82 Finish the hole all square (5)
- 83 He is known as Juke Box in Scotland (5)
- 86 Wimbledon's first black men's champion (4)



COMPILED BY NORMAN GILLER

NAME:

ADDRESS:

DAYTIME TELEPHONE:

RADIO 1

File 97.5-98.5 MHz
6.00am Chris Moyles 9.00am Simon Mayo 12.00 Jo Whitey 3.00pm Dave Pearson 6.00pm News 6.30pm Judge Judy Christmas Special 10.30pm Scandi Dance Party 1.00am Essential Mix The Dream Team 3.00am Charlie Jordan

RADIO 2

File 98-99.2 MHz
6.00am Alan Lester 7.30am Wake Up to Wogan 9.30am Ken Bruce 11.30am Jimmy Young 1.00pm Anselm Holter's Challenge 1.05pm Phil Collins' Groovy Kind of Music 3.00pm The Goon Show 5.00pm Richard Ainsworth 5.30pm So Here It Is, Merry Christmas 7.00pm Nick Barracough's New Country Christmas 8.00pm A Mary Marry Christmas 8.30pm Sing Something Seasonal (f) 9.30pm Alan Freeman: The Greatest Hits 10.30pm The Seder's Parlorina Tale 11.00pm Carols by Candlelight 12.00am Patrick Lint 3.00am Katrina

RADIO 3

File 90.2-92.4 MHz
6.00am On Air with Stephen Hughes Includes Scatoli (Cantata Pargolito in Rozze Facci), Tchaikovsky (Sulla Motoscopia), Tosti Concerto (Crosso in G minor), Prokofiev (Suite L'entraineur Kje)
7.00am Morning Collection Stanley (Concerto in D); Prokofiev (Six Braxelles); Tchaikovsky (Song from Prince); Strauss (Also Sprach Zarathustra)
10.00am Musical Encounters with Gershwin, Lerner, Rodgers and Loesser (The Sound of Music); Bernstein (Prelude, Fugue and Riffs for Solo Clarinet and Jazz Ensemble)
12.00pm Composers of the Week: British Light Music
1.00pm The Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert Live from the Adlon Hotel Hall. The pianist Philip Martin plays Liszt's Weibachschloß
2.00pm Midweek Choice with Susan Sharpe. Call 0171-765 4308
3.00pm Nursery Rhymes: Hey Diddle Diddle (3/5)
4.00pm Clement and Beethoven's Clements (Piano Sonata in C minor)
4.45pm Tunes of the Century Robert Cushman looks at Tony Hancock (f)
5.00pm In Repertory The Times opera critic Rodney Milnes talks to Kurt Sira about Belmondo in Mozart's Die Entführung aus dem Serail (f)
6.00pm Schubert: Songbook Gordon Stewart introduces a series of female authors (f)
6.15pm In Country Churches St Mary's, Finedon, Northamptonshire. Adrian Jack visits a mid-14th-century church with a remarkable library of very rare books
7.00pm Performances on 2: Musical Theatre. Performed by Hilary Mantel, soprano, Robin Black, countertenor, John Mark Ainsley, tenor, John Tomlinson, bass, the BBC National Chorus and Orchestra of Wales under Nicholas Kraemer
8.00pm Postcard Christmas Day by Paul Dorian (3/5)
8.15pm A Breath of Summer: Northern Wind Ensemble performs Mozart (Serenade in E flat, excerpts)
10.00pm Ensemble A recital by the pianist Bernard d'Arcy. Chopin (Preludes)
10.45pm The Shellee Show: Jenny Nicholson
11.30pm Composer of the Week: Prokofiev (f)
12.00am Jazz Notes with Digby Fairweather
1.00pm Through the Night with Donald Macleod

RADIO 4

File 92.4-94.4 MHz; LW: 198 kHz; MW: 780 kHz
5.55am (LW) Shipping Forecast 6.00am News Briefing 6.10am Farming Today 6.25am Prayer for the Day 6.30am Today 8.45am The Nation's Favourite Poems 8.55am Weather 9.00am News 9.05am Midweek with the Times columnist Lucy Purves 10.00am (FM) News: The Garden (3/4)
10.00am (LW) News: Daily Service
10.15am (LW) On This Day with Geoffrey Wheeler
10.30pm Woman's Hour introduced by Jenni Murray
11.30pm The Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens, dramatised by Marilyn Reid (1/6)
12.00pm News: You and Yours with John Wile 12.25pm Babyhood (3/6) 12.55pm Weather 1.00pm The World at One with James Cro 1.40pm The Archers (f) 1.55pm Shipping Forecast 2.00pm News: Belshazzar by Bernard Williams, dramatised by Pauline Jones 3.00pm Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge 4.30pm Spruced Up! The broadcaster and naturalist Ben Ockie explores the plantations of the Norfolk spruce 4.55pm PM 5.00pm Shipping Forecast 5.55pm Weather 6.00pm Six O'Clock News 6.30pm Weather 6.55pm News 7.00pm News 7.05pm The Archers 7.20pm Arthur Smith Live at Leicester Forest East Service Station Arthur Smith plays host to investors and friends as they pass through the service station. With Benedict Allen and Ollie Keane (f)
9.30pm The Pickwick Papers (1/6) (f)
10.00pm The World Tonight Special Double: A topical debate 10.45pm Book at Bedtime: Playbook by Raymond Chandler (3/10) (f)
11.00pm The Cheese Shop Presents... The Brandy Butler Factor A festive selection of comedy sketches
11.30pm Midweek News: The first communion of Christmas from the Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool
12.00pm News 12.30pm The Late Book: Christmas at the End of the Road by Tom Bodett (3/5)
12.45pm Shipping Forecast 1.00am As World Service

RADIO 5 LIVE

MW: 693, 900 kHz
6.00am The Breakfast Programme 9.00am Gary Robertson 12.00pm Midday with Mark 1.00pm News 1.30pm News 2.00pm News 2.30pm News 3.00pm News 3.30pm News 4.00pm News 4.30pm News 5.00pm News 5.30pm News 6.00pm News 6.30pm News 7.00pm News 7.30pm News 8.00pm News 8.30pm News 9.00pm News 9.30pm News 10.00pm News 10.30pm News 11.00pm News 11.30pm News 12.00pm News 12.30pm News 1.00pm News 1.30pm News 2.00pm News 2.30pm News 3.00pm News 3.30pm News 4.00pm News 4.30pm News 5.00pm News 5.30pm News 6.00pm News 6.30pm News 7.00pm News 7.30pm News 8.00pm News 8.30pm News 9.00pm News 9.30pm News 10.00pm News 10.30pm News 11.00pm News 11.30pm News 12.00pm News 12.30pm News 1.00pm News 1.30pm News 2.00pm News 2.30pm News 3.00pm News 3.30pm News 4.00pm News 4.30pm News 5.00pm News 5.30pm News 6.00pm News 6.30pm News 7.00pm News 7.30pm News 8.00pm News 8.30pm News 9.00pm News 9.30pm News 10.00pm News 10.30pm News 11.00pm News 11.30pm News 12.00pm News 12.30pm News 1.00pm News 1.30pm News 2.00pm News 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SAILING 29

Whitbread skipper
rues costly
tactical mistake

SPORT

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 24 1997

WOMEN IN SPORT 33

Nock discovers
the knack
of winning



FA sanctions Boxing Day return

Klinsmann in clear to play against Villa

By Matt Dickinson

AFTER waiting 2½ years for his return, Tottenham Hotspur supporters yesterday began counting down the hours until the moment that they could savour again the skills of Jürgen Klinsmann. They might get their wish sooner than they thought.

When he made his dramatic reappearance at White Hart Lane on Monday, it was thought that Klinsmann's initial opponents would be Arsenal on Sunday. However, the Germany striker was yesterday cleared to make an immediate return to the FA Carling Premiership on Boxing Day, when Tottenham play Aston Villa.

Alan Sugar, the Tottenham chairman, rushed to get the paperwork completed and the Football Association received Klinsmann's transfer certificate from their Italian counterparts yesterday afternoon.

Peter Barnes, the Tottenham secretary, said: "Jürgen is available to play at Aston Villa now that all the paperwork is completed, although whether he does play depends on Christian Gross (the head coach)."

Klinsmann's appearance at Villa Park would almost certainly mean a renewal of

Smith graduates 33

acquaintances with Mark Bosnich, the Australia goalkeeper who was involved in an aerial collision with him three seasons ago. Klinsmann was knocked unconscious and Tottenham supporters never forgave Bosnich. They taunted him mercilessly at White Hart Lane the next season and his response of a Nazi salute was deemed particularly insens-

itive at a club with such widespread Jewish connections. Bosnich claimed that it was a joke that misfired.

Gross refused to rule out the possibility of Klinsmann playing at Villa Park, saying "maybe" when the notion was put to him yesterday. It appears increasingly likely, however, that his surprise £175,000 signing will not join the club's struggle against relegation until the weekend.

Klinsmann, who has agreed to cut short a fortnight's holiday he had planned with his family over Christmas and the new year, had hinted strongly on Monday that Arsenal were the first opponents in his sights.

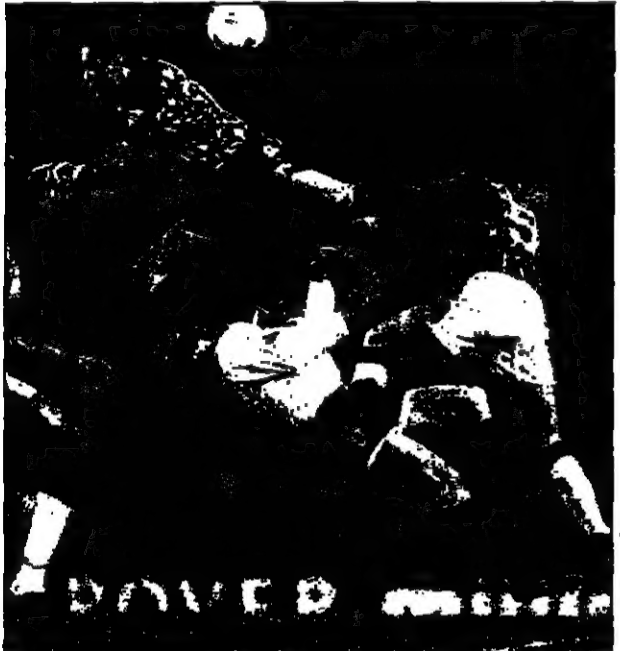
It would be a return to savour, as well as pitting him against Arsène Wenger, who, as manager of AS Monaco, brought him to France and then sold him to Tottenham two years later.

Wenger's decision to offload Klinsmann in 1994 was a surprise, given that he had done an excellent job of replacing George Weah by scoring 38 goals in two seasons. Wenger died yesterday that it had been because of a rift. "We had many young strikers like Sonny Anderson, Henry and Djork Arffelt at Monaco," Wenger said. "Klinsmann was nearly 30 and he wanted to go. If you look at his career, he has moved a lot. It is part of his personality to discover new cities, new countries. He is very intelligent, very gifted at languages and very curious. He was ready to leave."

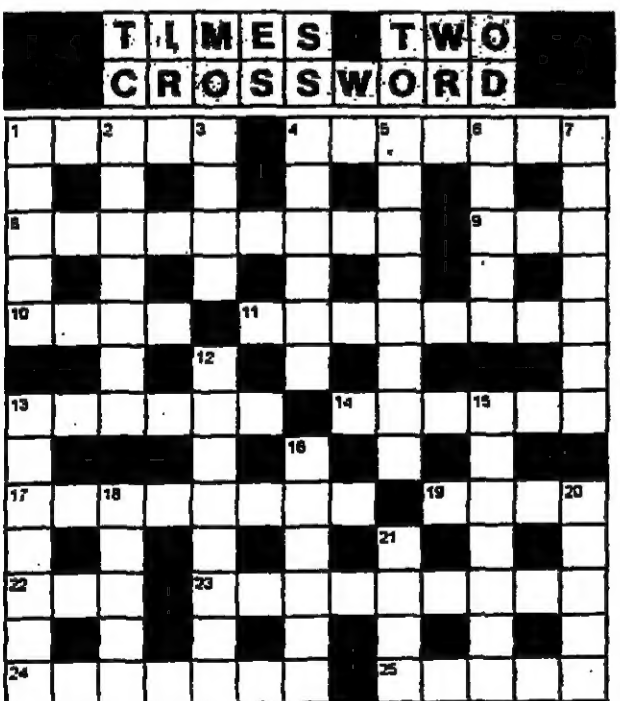
"I am sure he can do well for Spurs. He is a good professional and a very fit guy. He is 33 years old and when you have a striker who lasts so long, who can play at the top level at that age, you know he must be serious. It is not a gamble for Spurs because it is short term. And he is cheap."

In Germany, opinion is not so generous. There is a growing belief that Klinsmann, despite being captain, is struggling to maintain his place in Bert Vogts's national team and that his move to the Premiership, where he is guaranteed first-team football not available at Sampdoria, is a gamble to try to keep his World Cup place.

One player who will not be involved in the north London derby is Tony Adams. The 31-year-old Arsenal defender will see a specialist about his back problem and is expected to be out of action for at least a month. Wenger is considering sending the England centre half to the south of France to recuperate.



Klinsmann is felled by Bosnich's challenge at Villa Park



No 1285

ACROSS

- 1 "Twas the — (5)
4 Generous (supply) (7)
8 "... before —, when — (9)
9 A meat: a drink (5)
10 Way out (4)
11 Rebel aboard (8)
14 Units of Roman legion (6)
14 (Horse) in the first three (6)
17 Fellow-feeling (8)
19 Solid: tricky (4)
22 Note of debt (1,1,1)
23 Indifference (9)
24 Minotaur killer (7)
25 "... all through the — (5)

DOWN

- 1 Mother-of-pearl (5)
2 Decorate (food) (7)
3 Duty (4)
4 University site (6)
5 Feasible (8)
6 Eccentric, improper (5)
7 Shadow-boxed; argued (7)
12 "... not a — was stirring — (8)
13 Sophist (7)
15 Fr. country house (7)
16 Shells (peas) oh dear! (US) (6)
18 "... not even a — (C) C Moore (5)
20 Slow learner (5)
21 Little island: little distance (8)

SOLUTION TO NO 1284

ACROSS: 1 Beggar 4 Dwarf 8 Floss 9 Refrain 10 Emu
11 Ripen 12 Strange 14 Treble 16 Larva 20 Excerpt
23 Pools 24 Ewe 25 Asunder 26 Arena 27 Tahoe 28 Mettle
DOWN: 1 Before the mast 2 Groupie 3 Arsenal 4 Defer
5 Amain 6 Pioneers Wake 7 Crush 13 Alf 15 Bye
17 Appease 18 Violent 19 Stern 21 Crumb 22 Radio

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